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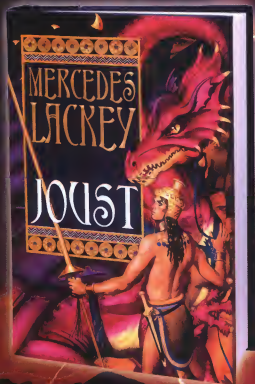


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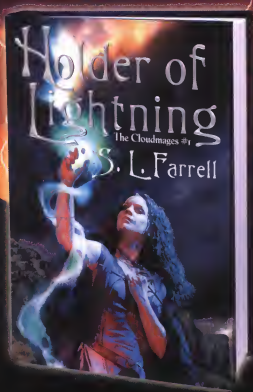
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Espies the Serpent  
Banner by Michael  
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is the subject of this  
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**DEALER INQUIRES WELCOME!**

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I have subscribed to your magazine since the first issue, and it is one of only two other fiction magazines which I read regularly. I tend to prefer novels, but other than reading short fiction for the enjoyment, I do have an ulterior motive. I mainly read short fiction to discover new authors. I have discovered F. Paul Wilson, J. Michael Reeves, and many others in this manner.

I just wanted to let you know I have discovered another great talent from your magazine. Her name is Julie E. Czerneda and the interesting part is that she didn't write a story for you. She wrote the *Gallery* article on Luis Royo, which featured the artwork from many of her books. As she described how the artist captured her main characters, I grew interested, so I bought *Beholder's Eye* from Amazon.com and the rest is history.

Keep up the good work, and maybe you can get Ms. Czerneda to write a story for your magazine in the future.

Jim Nason  
Bellefontaine, Ohio

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

I read a lot and subscribe to many magazines, and have always loved the content of *Realms of Fantasy* (long may she wave). I rarely feel compelled to send feedback to editors—you get enough crap mail from Joe/Josephine Writer-Wannabe trying to be smart & cool and get their name published, even if only in the "Letters" column. But I need to let you (and hopefully the author) know that "Stegosaurus Boy" by Steven Popkes in your February 2003 issue is one of the best stories I've read in a long, long time. Besides being a superior read, it contained those rare turns of phrase that really gave me goosebumps, that made me stop my reading to say out loud, "Damn, that's good!" (and totally freak out my cat, who was sleeping peacefully on my lap). Major kudos to the author. He is a very talented writer; hopefully I will be reading more from him in the future.

Anneliese Jacroux  
Bellevue, Washington

Dear Editor,

Since "The Librarian's Daughter," I have been following with much interest the stories of Carrie Vaughn that have appeared in the pages of *Realms*. So far, Ms. Vaughn has shown me that she is a worthy successor to the "New Wave" of sword-and-sorcery fantasy, blending her tales of faraway places with just a touch of horror, making them truly stand out in a fantasy genre where most seem more concerned with offering a sense of demure comfort rather than true

adventure. The wearing of a dead lover's skin, the demons that can haunt even the bravest of warriors, and most recently, the unicorn hunter's art all provide the kind of edge that short fantasy fiction needs these days in order to push it away from the comfortable light and into a daring new dark frontier. Kudos to Ms. Vaughn, and to those who would follow in her footsteps!

Robert Eaves  
Denver, Colorado

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I am writing to you in hopes of drumming up support for Fox's *Firefly*, which has been very badly treated by its network. It settled the show in a time slot that historically performs poorly, and then failed to advertise the show after *Firefly*'s initial airing. Fox also forced producers to pull the original two-hour pilot, calling it "horning." [The pilot aired in December.] Unfortunately, Fox then aired the episodes out of order, beginning with the two weakest. This move sacrificed important character development, and gave the viewers a muddled impression of the *Firefly* world and characters that took several episodes to dispel. Just when the show began to truly gain momentum, Fox removed it from their lineup for two weeks, losing even some devoted viewers who believed it was canceled.

Amazingly, *Firefly* has risen above these difficulties, rewarding those viewers who made the effort to continue watching past the first episode (that in and of itself difficult, due to hashall preemptions in many areas).

First, this show flies right out of all its assigned genres. It isn't simply a western, a sci-fi, a drama, or a comedy, it's a satisfyingly balanced mix of all four, smoothly integrating many varied elements. The dialogue crackles with jokes and dramatic intensity, sometimes both within the same line!

While I am grateful to the Fox network for bringing me *Firefly* to begin with, I feel that it has not made any effort to make viewers aware of it, only to complain that not enough people are watching. I assume that the people who run the network are not as unintelligent as this would make them appear, and I hope that they will give this innovative show the chance it deserves.

Keep *Firefly* flying!

Sincerely,  
Karen M. Keen  
Baltimore, Maryland

Your letters are welcome. Send them to: *Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy*, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, e-mail to: [realmsoffantasy@aol.com](mailto:realmsoffantasy@aol.com).

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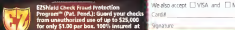
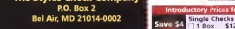
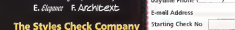
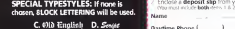
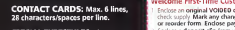
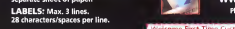
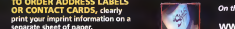
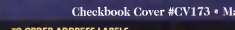
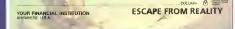
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I played dress-up a lot as a kid. "A lot" doesn't cover it, actually; looking back, I realize that most of my favorite amusements allowed for some kind of weird item of clothing or bizarre role-playing behavior. I loved Christmas, of course, but I adored Halloween.

In college, I started getting nervous. Here were all my dress-up skills, honed to a shiny edge, and what was I going to do with them? The theater department was already well-stocked with people who could dress up and remember lines. (Besides, the department was a little, um, emotionally dysfunctional.) Was my closet destined to be filled with office-worthy flannel and Saturday T-shirts for the rest of my life? Was I never going to own that Florentine basket-hilt sword with the matching dagger, or learn to dance a quadrille? Would I never again get to pretend to be somebody else, in some other time and place?

You, clever reader, already know the answer to that: "Oh, puh-leeze."

In college, I discovered the Society for Creative Anachronism, and got to play medieval lady of the manor (and helped found the campus club). The Minnesota Renaissance Festival sucked me in, first as a visitor, then as a performer (paid to pretend—what a deal!). I tried my first Regency dance at a science fiction convention, and was hooked on the easy choreography and the elegant manners. When I

moved to California, I found my friends were going to Victorian balls four times a year, and I had to acquire a hoop skirt. While doing research for a novel, I wandered into End of Trail, where cowboys, cowgirls, lawmen, and desperados live out the fantasy and history of the Old West ... and now I'm a cowgirl, too.

As I write this, I'm preparing to move, which always calls for some lightening of the household load. A Victorian ball gown and a Regency dinner dress went off to the thrift store (and I wonder what they'll make of them). It's not that I no longer need them; I just need better ones. The Italian Renaissance gown, underskirt, and chemise are staying. So's the Renaissance drag: man's shirt, tunic, and tights, with a nice little cap to match (men's



Be a spectator at or participant in a medieval jousting match at the Maryland Renaissance Festival or other fairs around the country.

clothes are so much easier to manage in the mud). The cowgirl clothes are essential, too, even though that big Sweetheart of the Rodeo circa-1920 palm straw hat takes up more room than the cat carrier.

If that sounds like your closet—with adjustments for preferred historical period and gender, if necessary—then you, too, may be a member of the Guild of Weekend Time Travelers, the Society for the Visitation of Past Lives.

When the editors of *Realms of Fantasy* asked me if I'd like to do a column on Renaissance fairs, I asked if I could expand the concept a little. Say, by five centuries or so. Twenty years ago, the fantasy genre was mostly focused on the medieval. Now fantasy writers' inspiration comes from all over the



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map and the timeline: ancient Egypt, Victorian England, Imperial China, the American Civil War, Renaissance Italy, the Wild West, the French Revolution. And the interests of fantasy readers have more than kept up.

But what if you'd like a little more than just reading? Wouldn't you like to pretend, just for a day or two, that you're living in the setting of your favorite novel? Sure you would. Especially if the experience came with decent bathrooms, and the promise of a hot shower and an Internet connection at the end of the day.

My plan for this column is to help you do just that; I'll be your past lives travel agent. It's a great time to get into the business, because there are more opportunities than ever before to play in the past, at whatever level of authenticity and immersion you're looking for.

You can walk the streets that Doc Holliday (and later, Val Kilmer playing Doc Holliday) walked, sweep your frock coat back from your fancy waistcoat, and drawl, "You're a daisy if you do." You can don armor and strive against your fellow knights in single combat, or help prepare and serve a historically correct medieval banquet. You can learn dances of the Victorian or English Regency period, and dance them in authentic formal wear. You can shoot black powder muzzle-loading rifles and gather with your fellow mountain men and women at a Rendezvous, or cowboy up circa 1880 and, armed with single-action six-guns, defend the range on horseback or on foot. You can (with several hundred other time travelers) recreate Civil War battles—either American or English.

And if all that is a little more intense than what you have in mind, you can simply stroll the pleasant grounds of your local Renaissance fair, so well costumed that 21st-century patrons will mistake you for a performer and ask you for directions. The glow of satisfaction you'll get from that will last all day.



**ABOVE:** Music plays a large part in all festivals, fairs, and re-creations. **OPPOSITE:** Author Emma Bull takes a tea break at a Regency dance with her husband, Will Shetterly, and wears a white bat at End of Trail.

As I mentioned before, I started my exploration of my past lives with the Society for Creative Anachronism, the SCA. As it was first described to me by a participant, the SCA is dedicated to recreating life in the Middle Ages ... but with indoor plumbing. There are chapters all over the United States and Canada, organized into medieval political units: shires, baronies, kingdoms.

If it was done in the Middle Ages, you can do it in the SCA. The group encourages members to create a medieval persona, dress appropriately, and research the skills and knowledge that person would have. There are special interest groups for almost any activity you can think of: fiber arts, leather work, paper making, music, food and drink, brewing, theater, poetry, blacksmithing—way too many things to list here. And of

course, there's the fighting.

SCA members have spent decades developing and refining methods of fighting medieval-style tournaments without actually killing each other. If you want to know how it might have felt to be Mordred or Arthur facing a foe on the battlefield, try SCA-style fencing, dressed in padded armor and swinging a heavy rattan "broadsword." It's sweaty, bruising ... and exhilarating.

Official activities include holiday feasts and dancing, concerts, and tournaments. The major events of the year are the five wars, held in various spots around the country. These are where SCA members meet in the countryside to camp, perform, demonstrate crafts, and fight like demons in settings and circumstances not all that different from, say, the Battle of Bosworth Field.

Maybe you'd rather not travel quite so far back in time? You're likely to find the Renaissance and Elizabethan England an easy drive from your front steps, no matter where in the United States you live. A Renaissance fair or festival, large or small, is happening on almost every weekend somewhere, all through the year.

Some fairs are only a weekend long. Others are every weekend for two months. Some, like the small town fairs of the period, are mostly craft booths, food, and games. Others are multi-acre pageants with real jousting, musical acts, clowns, staged sword fight, and a king and queen and their court to preside over it all.

Not every Renaissance fair actively encourages paying guests to come in costume, but you won't get in trouble for doing it. You'll find that wearing a well-researched, well-executed costume will make your day at the fair even more fun. And you'll get first-hand knowledge of what it was like to manage those skirts in the dust, or keep the sword at your hip from thumping passers-by. At some

## resources to get you started

**The Lively Arts History Association.** LAHA is headquartered in southern California, but it's a wonderful clearinghouse for information on period events, dances, manners, and re-creations of all kinds of entertainments. Browsing their web site will make you want to fling yourself into historical re-creation without delay. LAHA, 7341 Etiwanda Ave., Reseda CA 91335; [www.lahacal.org](http://www.lahacal.org)

**The Society for Creative**

**Anachronism** This is the head office, as it were, but they'll be glad to send you information, including the location of your local baron or seneschal. SCA, P.O. Box 360789, Milpitas, CA 95036-0789; [www.sca.org](http://www.sca.org)

**The Single Action Shooting Society.** Write for information and a sample copy of *The Cowboy Chronicle* (the latter will probably require a small fee) or visit their Web site for information, links, affiliated merchants,

and more. SASS, 23255 La Palma, Yorba Linda, CA 92887; [www.sassnet.com](http://www.sassnet.com)

**Renaissance Magazine.** This is a newsstand magazine for RenFair fans and participants, with beautiful photos, articles about fairs around the country, and ads from costumers, sword makers, and anything else you need to make your costume complete. 1450 Barnum Avenue, Suite 207, Bridgeport, CT 06610; [www.renaissancemagazine.com](http://www.renaissancemagazine.com)

**Friends of the English Regency.** These folks put on a Spring Assembly and an

Autumn Ball, as well as providing an umbrella for dancing groups around the country. Members organize balls at science fiction conventions, where they teach the dances. 3294 S. Malcolm Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90034; [www.regencyfriends.org](http://www.regencyfriends.org)

**The Greater Bay Area Costumers' Guild.** One of the best Web sites for anyone making a historic costume, whether you're just starting out or an experienced sewer. Wonderful links to fabric, pattern, and accessory sites, as well as pattern reviews and advice. [www.gbacg.org](http://www.gbacg.org)

fairs, craftspeople sell period clothing; if you pass through the gates and are seized with uncontrollable envy of all those elegantly (or scruffily!) costumed folk, you can plunge into a booth and come out as a peasant or a noble or a Black Knight.

Renaissance fairs are one of the results of North Americans' fascination with all things English, authentic or not. We also love Victorian England, and the late-18th-century, early-19th-century period of Jane Austen and the English Regency. The clothes, the manners, the social events of those times are ideal for playacting. The winter holiday season is a good time to find Victorian costume balls all around the country, as well as Dickens Fairs (sort of Renaissance fairs in Victorian dress, populated by gentlemen, ladies, chimney sweeps, flower-sellers, street singers, and waifs of all descriptions).

Several groups around the country hold Regency period dances. At these, and at the Victorian balls, dance teachers show you the ropes of country dances, waltzes, and quadrilles, and coach you along as you do them, often to the music of a live, historically appropriate band. Sometimes the dance is an all-day affair, with a dance lesson in the morning, a tea, a lecturer who'll explain the fine points of flirting with a fan or the rules of dueling, and an excellent dinner.

North American history offers excellent past-life tripping, too. Civil War reenactor groups around the country rehearse and perform authentic skirmishes, set up encampments, and generally provide education and excitement for historical celebrations. Some of them even have cannon, so if you've ever wanted to see and hear a real one fired—or even help fire it!—seek these groups out. Rendezvous groups spend their weekends living the life of 18th-century fur trappers, and meet as they did for fun, music, trading, and swapping stories, at annual encampments. Many of them actually hunt with the weapons of the period, and learn to tan leather, do bead and quill ornamentation in Native American style, make tin and iron camp gear, and cook over an open fire.

The cowboy re-creationists aren't limited to far western North America. The James-Younger gang's raid on the Northfield, Minnesota, bank happens every year on the streets of Northfield, complete with horses—and the brave reenactors who fall off them.



Gunfighter groups perform the shootout at the O.K. Corral from North Carolina to Oregon. If you love to playact in public, find one of these reenactor groups near you and join the posse.

If you enjoy target shooting, you can find a Single Action Shooting Society club near you that meets every month. Club members shoot their way through scenarios based on Western history, movies, and TV shows, using authentic firearms and dressed in the clothing of the period. SASS members even choose an alias and develop a character to match.

Those every-month gatherings are only the start of the cowboy fun, though. SASS holds regional matches throughout the country, and the annual world championship match called End of Trail. At these larger matches, you'll find Wild West shows, gunfight reenactments, vendors of western merchandise, chuckwagon cooking contests, horse training demonstrations, and mounted shooting competitions.

Imagine barrel racing with six-guns, and you'll have a faint notion of how much fun mounted shooting is to watch.

For those of you who want real historical immersion, nothing beats volunteering at a local living history site. You'll have a chance to role-play a character of the time on the spot where history happened. You may apprentice yourself to a blacksmith, or learn the mysteries of a wood-burning kitchen stove, or plow a field behind a team of horses. And you'll have a chance to pass on what you learn to visitors who may end up as time travelers themselves one day.

No matter what period or activity you sample as you travel into your past lives, you'll find it gives extra spice to all your fiction reading. You'll know the smell of a campfire or gunpowder smoke. You'll have heard the rustle of silk skirts, the creak of saddle leather, or the clashing of armor. You'll have tasted meat and trifle and buffalo jerky. Whenever you read about those things, they'll come alive for you in a way they never did before.

I'll go into more detail in future columns about the groups I mentioned here and others besides, as well as ways to build a costume and a character, and as much insider information and gossip about historical re-creation as I can gather. Meanwhile, see the box for very short, incomplete list of sources to help you get started visiting your past lives. ☛

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## Changeling tales reflect the beliefs, fears, and mysteries of their times.

Come away, O human child!" call the fairies in a poem by William Butler Yeats inspired by Irish folktales of children abducted to fairyland. Yeats was a folklore enthusiast and a lifelong believer in the fairy folk. His poem "The Stolen Child" is rooted in changeling tales found throughout the British Isles, as well as in other lands with fairy traditions of their own. Changeling stories are not "fairy tales," as the term is commonly used today. They are not set "once upon a time" in magical lands distant from our own, like fairy tales such as *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, or *Puss in Boots*. Changeling stories are folk legends, usually set in the same country as the teller, and come from an ancient belief system in which fairies are real, co-existing with mortals.

A typical changeling story is the following tale from the mountains of northern Wales: A farmer and his wife lived in a cottage with their infant son. One day, while the farmer was in the field, the wife was called away from home to tend to the health of an old woman who lived just down the road. The child was sleeping peacefully, so the farmwife left the babe in the cradle while she visited her neighbor, turning homeward again at dusk. As she traveled back, her path was crossed by the Twyleth Teg (the fairies of Wales), so she rushed to her house and was greatly relieved to find the cradle undisturbed. She quickly

scattered salt on the door step and on each of the window sills to protect the child from fairy mischief, as she should have done before.

Alas, she was too late. The boy had been a fat and jolly child, but now he grew pale and wan and howled in his cradle for hours on end.



Brian Froud's human child does not appear to be afraid of the ogres around him. The child in Wendy Froud's sculpture is beginning to wither.

"This creature is not ours," said the farmer. "Whose then should he be?" said the wife. "He belongs to the Twyleth Teg," said the man. "We must put him out on the cold hillside and see if the fairies come to reclaim him." But his wife would not allow any harm to come to the child she thought was her own.





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Fairies joyfully spirit a human baby away in a classic illustration by Arthur Rackham.

The troubled woman continued to feed and dress and clean the babe, though his face now looked like a wizened old man's and his milk teeth grew into points. The infant's appetite grew and grew while his chest and his stick-like limbs seemed to shrink. When the baby had eaten through all of their stores, and still he continued to howl for more, the farmwife left the cottage to seek her old neighbor's advice.

"Go home," the old woman replied, "and do what I shall tell you to do. Then you will know if this is your son, or one of the Twyleth Teg."

Following the old woman's instructions, the farmwife procured a large hen's egg, returned to the cottage, and broke the egg in front of the child's cradle. She cleaned the shell and filled it with porridge, then set it to boil on the fire. The infant watched her closely with a frown on his wizened face. Finally, he could contain his curiosity no longer. "What are you doing?" the boy piped up.

The woman was startled to hear him speak but answered as she'd been instructed. "Why, I'm making dinner for the men in the fields. They'll be hungry after all of their work."

The infant laughed and said: "Acorn before oak I knew, and an egg before a hen, but never before have I seen an eggshell brew dinner for harvest men."

With these words, the creature betrayed his great age and the farmwife knew that her husband was right. This was not their own dear boy but a fairy who'd taken his place. She picked up the shovel and put more coals on

the fire until it roared with heat.

"What are you doing now?" asked the infant.

"Preparing to throw you on the fire." As she spoke these words, she snatched him up and threw the creature onto the flames, where he changed to a puff of smoke and left the house through the chimney. And in his place sat her own fine son, returned by the Twyleth Teg.

There are numerous variants of this curious story. In some versions the threat of violence alone is enough to betray the fairy's true nature, while in others it's beer that the farmwife brews in a shell, to the fairy's surprise. In a changeling tale from the Isle of Man, a visiting tailor discovers the fairy's deception. When his hosts leave the house to work in the fields, leaving the tailor alone with the child, the infant leaps up from the cradle, demanding whisky and a fiddle tune. In most stories, the human child is restored safe and sound once the changeling has fled, though there are healer versions in which the only resolution of the tale is the banishment of the troublesome fairy, while the real child remains lost forever. In some of the tales, however, further action is needed to save the child, kept in captivity or slavery in a fairy hill. In a tale from the West Highlands of Scotland, for instance, the son of a smith is stolen away and an evil-tempered changeling called a Sihhreach is left in his place. The Sihhreach is exposed and banished, but still the mortal child remains missing, and the smith must go in search of him beneath a fairy hill. He waits for a night when the hill will be open, then follows the sound of fairy music. Armed with a Bible, a knife,

and a cock, he walks boldly into the fairy court. The Bible protects him from their mischief, the knife holds open the door of the hill, and the crowing cock annoys the fairies so much that they toss the smith and his son back into the mortal world.

There are various reasons given for the fairies' penchant for stealing human children. Some tales imply that the young mortals are destined for lives as servants or slaves, or are kept (in the manner of pets) for the amusement of their fairy masters. Some stories (in echo of the folk ballad *Tam Lin*) suggest a darker purpose: that the fairies must pay a tithe of blood to the devil every seven years, and prefer to pay with mortal blood rather than blood of their own. In some traditions, however, it's simply the beauty of the children that attracts the fairies, who also kidnap pretty young women, artists, and musicians. The ability of fairies to procreate is a debatable issue in fairy lore. Some stories maintain that the fairies do procreate, though not as often as humans. By occasionally interbreeding with mortals and claiming mortal babes as their own, they bring new blood into Fairyland and keep their bloodlines strong. Other tales suggest that they cannot breed, or do so with such rarity that jealousy of human fertility is the motive behind child-theft.

Some stolen children, the tales tell us, will spend their whole lives in Fairyland—and may even find happiness there, losing all desire for the lands of men. Other tales tell us that human children cannot thrive beneath the hills, and eventually sicken and die for want of mortal food and drink. Some fairies main-



tain their interest in child captives only during their infancy, tossing the children out of the fairy realm when they show signs of age. Such children, restored to the human world, are not always happy among their own kind, and spend their mortal lives pining for a way to return to Faerie.

One of the interesting aspects of changeling tales is that each contains the seeds of two separate stories: of the human child in Fairyland, and of the changeling in the mortal world. The changeling "child" isn't usually a child at all, but merely takes on that appearance. Sometimes changelings are old, nasty fairies who revel in the sorrow they cause; or fairies with prodigious appetites for human food or mortal breast milk. Sometimes the changelings are fairies so old and worn out that their kinfolk have left them behind, happy to be rid of them in exchange for a plump human child. In these cases, the changeling withers and dies while the human parents look on, grieving for the loss of a baby they think is their own son. Yet we do find some interesting stories in which the fairy changeling is also a child. One tale from England's West Country tells of a farmer's youngest son who is stolen and replaced by a sickly, sallow, silent imp of a boy. The farmer and his wife raise the queer little child as tenderly as their own. Some years later, a piskie appears at their door. "Father!" the boy cries out. The pair runs off, and the farm is blessed with good fortune from that day forward (though no mention is made, at the end of the tale, of the fate of the farmer's true son). Sometimes the changeling is not even a fairy—merely a stock of wood, or a block of wax, enchanted to look like a child. When the trick is discovered, the "infant" must be thrown onto the hearth fire. Wood burns, or wax melts away, and then the true child is restored.

In Germany, the Brothers Grimm collected a number of interesting changeling tales, such as the story of the Rye-Mother (or Grain-Wife), published in *German Legends*. A nobleman had forced one of his peasants to work binding sheaves during the harvest, even though the poor woman had given birth but a few weeks before. She took the child to the field, lay it down, and got on with her work, despite her fears for the child because it had not yet been properly baptized. Some time later, the nobleman himself saw a Rye-Mother cross the field. She carried a child in her arms, which she exchanged for the peasant's baby. The false child began to cry, and the peasant hurried over to nurse it—but the nobleman held her back. He made her wait while the child cried and wailed—until at last the Rye-Mother returned, exchanged the children again, and left with her own child, who now quieted in his mother's arms. "After seeing all of this transpire," the Grimms write, "the nobleman summoned the peasant woman and told her to return home. And from that time forth he

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resolved to never again force a woman who had recently given birth to work."

In other German stories, mortal children are stolen and held captive by hands of elves, who leave greedy changelings called killcrops behind in the cradle, wailing for food. The kill-crop is revealed through the brewing of beer in an eggshell, or some other trick, then threatened with violence to make it flee, restoring the mortal child. Nickerts are German water fairies fond of stealing children from unwary parents, then taking their place in the cradle in order to eat mortal food and milk. Nixies also inhabited German rivers, and could be dangerous. "From time to time nixies would emerge from the Saal River," wrote the Brothers Grimm, "and go into the city of Saalfeld where they would buy fish at the market. They could be recognized by their large, dreadful eyes and by the hems of their skirts that were always dripping wet. It is said that they were mortals who, as children, had been taken away by nixies, who had then left changelings in their place."

In Scandinavia, healthy mortal infants had to be guarded from covetous trolls, who found them more beautiful and appealing than their own peevish, hairy troll children. One farmwife, suspecting her own sweet-natured child had been stolen by the trolls, was determined to rid herself of the troublesome creature who had taken his place. She set a cauldron in the hearth, took hold of the porridge spoon, and bound a number of rods to it till the spoon reached up to the ceiling. "Well!" the child blurted out. "I am old as the trees and old as the hills, but never in my life have I seen such a long, long spoon for such a small, small pot!" Confirmed in her suspicions, the farmwife beat the changeling with her broom. As he howled and wailed, a troll-wife entered the cottage hearing the farmwife's son and said, "See how we differ! I've cherished your son, while you beat my husband black and blue!" She then took the changeling by the hand and disappeared up the chimney.

Similar tales can be found the world over. In India, tigers stole mortal children and left behind tiger cubs in disguise. When the trick was uncovered, the tiger cubs threatened with harm, the tiger then returned, restored the mortal child, and disappeared with his own wild children. In Japan, children stolen by the fairies were rarely restored to the human world unless the substitution could be discovered before the child ate fairy food. In an odd twist on the theme, in old Persian tales it was the fairies (called peries) whose children were stolen—by evil creatures called djinn, who substituted their own children instead.



The infant Peter Pan is the fairies' orchestra in another illustration by Arthur Rackham from *Peter Pan* in Kensington Gardens.

We find stories in various cultures in which such substitution, rather than abduction, is the goal. In these tales, mortals are the unwitting foster parents for fairy children.

Such children are generally odd, dreamy, and incapable of human emotion. Eventually these parents learn that the changeling child is not, in fact, of their blood. The changeling is called back to Fairyland, and the human child is restored.

A number of preventive measures are recommended to insure against fairy abduction.

Writing in *Notes of the Folk-lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Border*, William Henderson tells us, "In the southern counties of Scotland children are considered before baptism at the mercy of the fairies, who may carry them off at pleasure or inflict injury upon them. Hence, of course, it is unlucky to take unbaptized children on a journey... Danish women guard their children during this period against evil spirits by placing in the cradle, or over the door, garlic, salt, bread, and steel in the form of some sharp instrument.... In Germany, the proper things to lay in the cradle are 'orant' (which is translated into either horehound or snapdragon), blue marjoram, black cummin, a right shirt sleeve, and a left stocking. The 'Nickert' cannot then harm the child. The modern Germans dread witchcraft at this period of their children's lives, and are careful not to leave them

alone during their first eight days, within which period the Greek Church refuses to baptize them." Other charms include wreaths made of ivy and oak, which hindered fairy access to a house; also salt on the doorstep, or branches of rowan, or the father's shirt draped over the cradle. Most of the children kidnapped were boys, so another method of thwarting the fairies was to dress little boys in girls' clothing and then to call them by female names. Newborn babies, it was advised, must be zealously guarded their first three days, and then closely watched until their baptism, when the threat of abduction lessened. Yet even older children could be stolen or tempted into Fairyland. Just as today young children are warned that they must never take candy from strangers, generations ago they were warned to beware of fairies that lurked in the countryside ... seductive creatures who would whisk them away, never to be seen again.

When we hear fairy tales, we're hearing a story we believe in just for the length of the tale—stories of impossible things, enchanted princesses, and cats in boots. Fairy legends, however, were cautionary tales meant to illustrate the particular dangers of encounters with creatures that many people once believed in.

The 16th-century preacher Martin Luther recounts this tale of a changeling in Germany. "Eight years ago at Dessau, I, Dr. Martin Luther, saw and touched a changeling. It was twelve years old, and from its eyes and the fact that it had all of its senses, one could have thought that it was a real child. It did nothing but eat; in fact, it ate enough for any four peasants or threshers. It ate, shit, and pissed, and whenever someone touched it, it cried. When bad things happened in the house, it laughed and was happy; but when things went well, it cried. It had these two virtues. I said to the Princes of Anhalt: 'If I were the prince or the ruler here, I would throw this child into the water—into the Molda that flows by Dessau. I would dare commit *bomicidium* on him!' But the Elector of Saxony, who was with me at Dessau, and the Princes of Anhalt did not want to follow my advice. Therefore, I said: 'Then you should have all Christians repeat the Lord's Prayer in church that God may exorcise the devil.' They did this daily at Dessau, and the changeling child died in the following year.... Such a changeling child is only a piece of flesh, a *massa carnis*, because it has no soul."

Changeling stories are both fascinating and horrifying when we realize how such tales once accounted for the mysteries of wasting illnesses, physical deformities, or mental illness. Children afflicted with diseases such as

tic fibrosis, cerebral palsy, and spina bifida, or by congenital problems such as Down syndrome, could be explained away as fairy changelings, sometimes with deeply tragic results. As late as the 19th century in England and Ireland, changeling stories in the press told of children subjected to violent "cures" intended to make the fairy flee and bring back the "real," healthy child. Sir William Wilde (medical commissioner for the Irish census, and father of Oscar Wilde), writing in 1854, decried "the cruel endeavors to cure children and young persons of such maladies generally attempted by quacks and those termed 'fairy men' and 'fairy women'."

The most famous case of "fairy doctoring" involved a grown woman in 1895, and riveted newspaper readers all across the British Isles. This was the murder of Bridget Cleary, a handsome young Irish woman who was killed by her husband, family, and neighbors because they thought she was a fairy changeling. The facts are these: Bridget, a 26-year-old dressmaker, and her husband Michael, a cooper, lived in a comfortable cottage near her family home in southern Ireland. Bridget fell sick with an undiagnosed illness (it may have been simple pneumonia); within a few days she was feverish, raving, and (according to her husband) no longer looked like herself. When regular medicine did not help, the family called in a "fairy doctor"—for the cottage was located close to a fairy hill, which was bad luck. The "fairy doctor" confirmed that the ill woman was actually a fairy changeling and the real Bridget had been abducted, taken under the hill by the fairies as a consort or a slave. The doctor devised several ordeals designed to make the changeling reveal itself. Bridget was tied to the bed, forced to swallow potions, sprinkled with holy water and urine, swung over the hearth fire, and eventually burned to death by her increasingly desperate husband. Convinced it was a fairy he had killed and buried (with the aid of her family and neighbors), Michael then went to the fairy fort to wait for the "real" Bridget to ride out seated on a milk-white horse. Bridget's disappearance was soon noted, the body found, the crime brought to light, and Michael and nine others were charged and prosecuted for murder. Although the most flamboyant, this was far from the only case of changeling murder in the Victorian press, although the poor "changelings" were more commonly children with physical or mental ailments.

Victorian interest in changeling stories extended to works of literature and art, as we see in many works from the period with changeling themes. Children were abducted by fairies and goblins in George MacDonald's story "Cross Purposes" (from *Gifts of the Child Christ*) and in his children's novel *The Princess and the Goblin*. The heroine of *Amelia and the Dwarfs* by Juliana Horatio Ewing was kidnapped by a pack of nasty dwarfs and replaced by a wooden stock. In Rudyard



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*A fairy queen holds an abducted human baby in front of her on the horse while other human children and fairies dance around them in a detail from Joseph Noel Paton's The Fairy Raid.*

Kipling's *Rewards and Fairies*, Puck denies the fairies' reputation for stealing human children. ("All that talk of changelings is people's excuse for their own neglect," he says.) For adult readers, we find changeling themes in Sheridan LeFanu's "The Child That Went with the Fairies," Walter Besant's *The Changeling*, Dinah Muroch Craik's *Olive*, Arthur Machen's *The Shining Pyramid*, and John Buchan's "The Watcher by the Threshold," to name but a few. Changeling poetry, in addition to Yeats' famous fairy poem, "The Stolen Child," includes Samuel Lover's "The Fairy Boy," Dr. Anster's "The Fairy Child," James Stephen's "Fairy Boy," James Russell Lowell's "The Changeling," and "The Changeling" by Charlotte Mew. In Fiona Macleod's affecting story "The Fara Ghael," a Scottish woman exposes her sickly "changeling" child on a lonely beach, and is given a beautiful girl in its place that she raises, thinking it is her own. Eventually she learns that wild, beautiful girl is the real changeling, and her own daughter was the unloved creature she'd left out by the tide. Artist Henry Fuseli tackled the subject in his nightmarish painting *The Changeling, Abduction by Moonlight*. Sir Joseph Noel Paton's intricate *The Fairy Raid* contains the image of a child stolen by the fairy queen. As folklorist Carol G. Silver remarks, "The pictured scene is less innocent than it first appears.... Thumb in its mouth, [the stolen child] stares bleakly out of the painting while its royal abductress—intent on the handsome fairy knight beside her—ignores it. Three pretty blond children, whose comparatively large size identifies them as human, appear to be dancing in a circle as they stroll beside the fairies on horseback. The little girl looks wistfully at the baby. The sinister implications of the painting emerge only when one notices that the children wear slender chains around

their ankles."

Most changeling tales from the folk tradition are told from the parents' point of view, but literary renditions often look at the other participants in the tale: the fairy changeling, the stolen child, even the fairy kidnappers. The most famous example of the latter is in William Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which revolves around a tiff between the Oberon (the fairy king) and Titania (the fairy queen) over the fate of a captive human child. *The Changeling*, by Selma Lagerlöf, based on Scandinavian tales, is a wonderful story about a human child abducted by a troll woman, and about the ugly troll child who is left behind in exchange. The distraught human parents are instructed to abuse the troll child to make it go away, but each time the father attempts this, the mother protects the ugly changeling. Eventually, their own child is restored—and then the human parents learn that every act of kindness or cruelty extended to the troll child was also received by the human child in the parallel world of the trolls. More recently, Eloise McGraw published a splendid novel, *The Moorchild*, about a changeling child left with humans when the fairies steal their baby. The novel follows the life of the changeling, struggling to cope with the mortal world and the alien concept of human emotion. It's a subtle, beautifully written story and highly recommended.

Changeling and stolen child stories are closely related to "wild child" tales—about lost children, runaway children, and feral children in the wilderness, the most famous of them being Mowgli's adventures in *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling. All these themes come together in J.M. Barrie's well-known tale of *Peter Pan*, in which the lost or wild child, Peter, becomes a kind of fairy himself (iden-

united with Puck, and Pan—god of the wilderness) to steal away the children in the Darlings' nursery in London. The original text of Barrie's *Peter Pan* is far more interesting than the sugary Disney-flavored adaptations most people know today, for Barrie's humor is arch, dark, and sometimes downright sinister. (For a fascinating look at Barrie and his creation, read J.M. Barrie: *A Study in Fairies and Mortals* by Patrick Baybrooke, and "The Boy Who Couldn't Grow Up" in Alison Lurie's *Don't Tell the Grown-ups: Why Kids Love the Books They Do*.) Lost child stories can be frightening, full of fears of abandonment writ large, but they can also be oddly exciting, as Mowgli and Peter Pan demonstrate. Here, the children live in a world beyond adult rules, a world of continual play and adventure, befriended by animals, fairies, and other denizens of the wild. Kipling's Mowgli eventually returns to human society, but Barrie's Peter is a more ambiguous creature, determined to dwell in perpetual childhood... although even he longs for the civilized world in the form of a mother's touch. The themes of such stories are as old as Remus and Romulus—the Roman myth of twins exposed in the wilderness, adopted, suckled, and raised by a wolf. We also find it at the core of medieval romances such as *Orson and Valentine*. Here, too, two infant children are left to die in the wilderness. One is saved and returned to civilization, the other is raised in the woods by bears. The two eventually meet and become bosom friends even before their kinship is revealed.

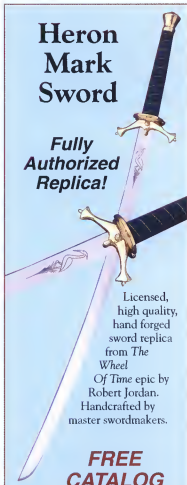
The specter of missing or stolen children has long been one of our greatest cultural fears. Today, we confront it every time we see a child's face on a milk carton, or (more benignly) in childish daydreams of running off with the circus. In earlier times, these fears expressed themselves in stories of stolen children: stolen by fairies (or pirates, or gypsies), or lost in the wilderness. In Victorian and earlier eras, the public was fascinated by actual cases of feral children found living in jungles or woodlands, their origins shrouded in mystery. One of the most famous of these was the Wild Boy of Aveyron, discovered in the forests of France in 1800, living off the raw flesh of the beasts and birds that he hunted. In India, in the 1920s, two small twin girls were discovered cohabiting in the wilds with a wolf pack, while in Russia, much more recently, an urban "wild child" was discovered living with a pack of dogs on the streets of St. Petersburg. When we read such tales with parental eyes, they are deeply disturbing ones... but when we read from the child's point of view, there is something secretly thrilling about the idea of shedding the strictures of civilization, heading into the woods and the wild. "Come away, O human child!" call the fairies, as they reach out to take us by the hand. Come away from all human sorrow, they promise—but fairy promises can deceive, and to follow their call, folklore reminds us, is a dangerous proposi-

tion. And eventually, like Mowgli, like Wendy Darling, like mortal children stolen by the fairies, goblins, nickerts and elves, we must return to the human world. We don't, alas, really belong in Fairyland, where the sun doesn't shine and the Folk never change and little boys never grow up.

Quite a number of good modern novels and stories can be found on the changeling and wild child themes. For changeling tales, I recommend the McGraw novel mentioned above; *The Lastborn of Elvewood*, a lyrical fantasy by Linda Haldeman; and *Tithe* by newcomer Holly Black, an edgy, contemporary tale about a teenage changeling in New Jersey. Theodore Sturgeon's arch story "Brat" is a modern classic of changeling fiction, as is "Lullabye for a Changeling," a thoroughly magical short story by Nicholas Stuart Gray. You'll find changeling elements in Robin McKinley's fine tale "Touck's House" from *A Knot in the Grain*; in A.S. Byatt's realist tale "The Changeling," from *Sugar and Other Stories*; and in the wry, adult fairy stories of *The Kingdoms of Elfin* by Sylvia Townsend Warner. Patricia McKillip also plays with changeling/ stolen child/lost child themes in a number of her works, such as the misplaced fairy child at the heart of *The Book of Atreus Wolfe* and the "waxling" in *Ombria in Shadow*. Younger readers might enjoy my own short book, *The Changeling*, in which Irish changeling legends are transplanted to North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains. *Wolf's Heart* by Jane Linskind is a fine fantasy novel of a child raised by wolves; I also recommend Alice Hoffman's gorgeous magical realist novel *Second Nature*. You'll find elements of the wild child theme in Jane Yolen's *Young Merlin* trilogy, and in her picture book *The Wolf Girls* (about the real-life wolf girls in India), written with her daughter Heidi Elisabeth Yolen Stemple. For short fiction, Angela Carter's "Wolf-Alice" (in *The Bloody Chamber*) is simply superb. To read more about changeling legends, I recommend *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* by Carole G. Silver's, *At the Bottom of the Garden* by Diana Purckiss, *Fairy Mythology* by Thomas Keightley, *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* by W.Y. Evans Wentz, and *The Encyclopedia of Fairies* by the eminent Katherine Briggs. The strange case of Bridget Cleary is discussed in depth in Angela Bourke's fascinating book *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*. The subject of feral children is explored in Michael Newton's excellent *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children*. Related material: "The Stolen Child" by William Butler Yeats has been recorded with music by Loreena McKennit, and also by The Waterboys; and the children's film *Labyrinth* (by Muppet-creator Jim Henson, with Brian and Wendy Froud) makes good use of the stolen child motif. On the Web, visit folklorist D.L. Ashliman's informative site full of changeling legends at: <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/changeling.htm>

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## New anthologies of horror and fantasy are a gift to all readers.

I think it would be reasonable, and quite likely therapeutic, if all lovers of fantastic art took a moment off every now and then to light a stick of incense in their private shrines and give thanks to those brave souls who, year after year, turn out huge, beautiful anthologies celebrating gorgeous imaginings containing not only what they feel to be the best short fiction of that kind but lovingly detailed criticism and reportage upon all of the other varied and increasingly multitudinous activities that have taken place in the field.

When, as the new year rolls around, I very gratefully pick up one of these marvelous tomes and heft it in my hands, I freely admit I am once again astounded that anyone—no matter how determined, no matter how fascinated, no matter how madly obsessed—could have, in a mere 12 months, read all those heaps of books and stacks of magazines and gobbled down those piles of comics and sat through all those movies and television shows and then sorted through the lot of them for the ones they liked the best and then sat themselves down and wrote thoughtful essays and reviews upon those selected. Then, by some series of miracles, they somehow shaped and organized all of that huge, tottering mountain of material into the book I am gratefully hefting now. Bless such as Robert Aickman and Karl Wagner, who are no longer with us; bless the ones we are about to speak of; and bless those who are yet to come. Bless them all!



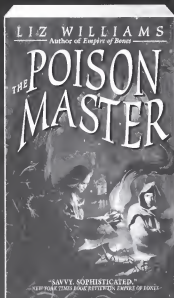
© 2002 by Thomas Canty

*A painting by renowned artist Thomas Canty graces the cover of The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror, edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling*

**The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror**, edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (St. Martin's Griffin, NY; hardcover; 542 pp.; \$35.00) is the oldest continuing survivor of these anthologies. It is now a full 15 years since that doughty team astonished and delighted us with book one of the series and, as is their habit, they have once again given us a superb selection of horrific and fantastic short stories and poems. This handsome anthology, hours and hours of marvelous reading, forms the beating heart of the enterprise (I intended to avoid commenting on any of these excellent works but I cannot in good conscience as a humorist resist publicly praising Marin Sorescu's poem "The Cowardly Coffin"—It's a bright, tiny gem of macabre wit that should not be missed!), but it is only a part of what this institution annually offers its readers and I confess that I have actually developed the habit of reading the stories



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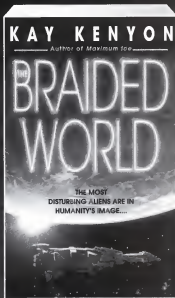
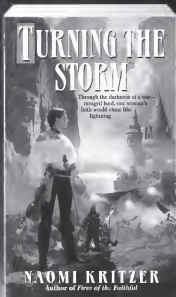


## THE POISON MASTER LIZ WILLIAMS

New from the author of *Empire of Bones* comes **THE POISON MASTER**, a "fantastic, whirlwind tale.... Part alien adventure, part existential exploration, this top-notch tale establishes Williams as an author to watch," raves *Publishers Weekly* in a starred review.

## TURNING THE STORM NAOMI KRITZER

Concluding the tale begun in *Fires of the Faithful*, here is an epic of persecution and war, passion and triumph, and of the brave young woman who must lead a nation into the light.



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last of all. The first thing I turn to are the wonderful summations by the two editors that always kick off the book. Windling handles what happened in the fantasy area during the past year and Datlow does the same for the horror genre, and in 30 to 40 pages each, printed in small type and written in the most compact possible language, the two of them kindly draw your attention to lovely material you would otherwise have missed (and I am so grateful for some of their pointings out), very gently warn you off legions of items that would otherwise have been a dreadful waste of your valuable time (ditto), and fill you in on a lot of stuff that will make you seem considerably more erudite than you actually are at talky parties.

Through the years Datlow and Windling have judiciously gathered up other perceptive and dedicated souls to assist them in

presenting us with a truly comprehensive survey of both fields in widely varied media. Edward Bryant does an excellent job of rounding up all of the more interesting fantastic and horrific films of the past year and is particularly clever in spotting movies that have been stuffed into the mainstream closet by both advertisers and not very perceptive reviewers (which is to say most of all of them) and are therefore missed by those fond of the macabre and fantastic. I fully intend to see a couple of the more intriguing ones he touted in this edition of *TBFCH* (which I only learned this year is the way those involved in producing the book refer to it). Charles Vess not only covers what's happening in the comic book area—both in the boldest new endeavors and reprints of beloved, heretofore mostly unobtainable classics—but thoughtfully gives readers practical advice on how to track down more obscure treasures. Joan D. Vinge's essay on Manga (Japanese comic books) and Anime (I certainly hope you know what that means) was very instructive to a neophyte such as myself, and each and every year I brace myself and turn to Jim Frenkel's rather depressing but certainly needful obituary section that has more times than I can count let me know for the very first time these past 15 years that a dear friend, personal or from far admired, will regretfully be heard from no more. You'll miss a very great deal, both in the wonderful stories and poems it presents and from the in-depth guidance it gives, if you don't get your hands on this book each and every year.

But always be sure to save a space in your library shelf next to the *TBFCH* for the latest *Mammoth Book of Horror*, in this case the 13th (Robinson, London, Great Britain; soft cover; 390 pp.; \$6.99), brilliantly edited and



most instructively introduced by the legendary anthologist Stephen Jones, or you'll be walking around on one leg, so to speak. Jones has been bringing out—and steadily maintaining the high quality of—this invaluable annual anthology of horror stories carefully culled from all sorts of publications here and abroad for lo these 13 years and no self-respecting relisher of the macabre should ever deny him or herself a copy of the latest.

The book is laid out more or less along the same lines as Datlow and Windling's, being a hugely generous anthology of short stories (no poems) accompanied by a massive introduction. That is a review of the past year's horror writing and publishing, films, and all sorts of other fields in the genre including—I admit I particularly relish checking out this section!—grisly action figures. You will also find an extensive Necrology (this co-edited with

Kim Newman), and the volume ends with the very aptly titled section: Useful Addresses.

The Foreword is more casually constructed than those by Datlow and Windling (no subheads, etc.) but is every bit as fully packed. The mood's a tad more gossipy and provides interesting insights as to why such and such a publisher tanked or why this or that film deal collapsed with all hands aboard. The Necrology does not restrict itself to literary types but includes such as the sweet blues singer and guitarist John Lee Hooker and good old James Bernard who dished out the swell scores for all those dandy Hammer horror movies (remember his musical rendering of the name DRAC—cu—la?) and, as with the Introduction, it gives decidedly more dish than the obits in *TBFCH*.

This is altogether a lovely and reliable publication, and it is my considered opinion that in order to live happy, fulfilled lives all devotees of the gruesome fantastic should acquire each new book in the series as it arrives.

As if *TMBONH* (two can play at that game!) was not a sufficient display of generosity to those fond of the darker side of fantasy, Stephen Jones also brings out a series of yearly anthologies called *Dark Terrors* (Gollanz, London, Great Britain, hardcover, 499 pp., \$17.99), and here is number 6, co-edited with David Sutton.

Unlike *Best New Horror*, this is not a gathering of stories from various publications but a collection of over 30 brand-new tales that were written specifically for *Dark Terrors 6*. It is clear that Jones and Sutton have the touch, for they manage not only to inspire a huge sampling of top-of-the-line authors to be at the best of their form, but also inspire people I have not heard

of (but look forward to hearing of again) to turn in truly stellar performances.

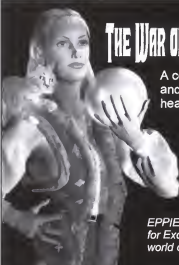
I have never met an issue of *Dark Terrors* I didn't like and number 6 strikes me as being one of the very best so far.

Apparently restive from not having enough to do last year, Stephen Jones, the same fellow as mentioned in the two preceding reviews, set himself a very interesting challenge by hitting upon the idea of digging up and recontaining the long defunct but legendary and still deeply beloved series of the shockingly spooky *Not at Night* anthologies that were brought out way back when in the twenties and thirties by literary agent Christine Campbell Thompson. To distinguish it from its predecessor, Jones' anthology is titled **Keep Out the Night: 12 Stories Weird and Grim** (PS Publishing, Harrogate, Great Britain; hardcover: 248 pp.; £45).

Thompson took stories from the pages of *Weird Tales*, *The Unique Magazine* to form her first anthology and all the rest that followed, thus giving many of that dear old publication's authors a rare (and, with some of them, unique) chance to see their work appear within hard covers. The *Not at Night* series ran for 12 volumes and to this day it is the goal of every serious collector of horror stories to get his or her hands on each and every one of them. Thompson's approach is clearly spelled out in a quote included in Jones' informative introduction to this collection: "From the very first I set myself against 'literature.' The story was the thing, and no amount of style could persuade me to select a story that lacked genuine, unadulterated horror."

The dare Jones gave himself was to see if he could gather a bookful of stories that would appall the reader of this era in the same way and with the same impact as the original stories Thompson selected for those readers of the 1920s and 1930s.

He sets the pace in a sneaky way by digging up a really swell shocker actually written back during the *Weird Tales* period by the legendary pulpster Hugh B. Cave and reprinting it for the first time since those hoary days as his lead story. It's a true doozy featuring a cast of heroes who are, by God, heroes, and villains who are, by God, villains, and millions of poisonous spiders that are, by God, spiders. He then goes on to present the readers with an extremely gory (wait'll you hit that last line!) shocker by Brian Lumley and a gruesome account of damned New Orleans decedents toying foolishly with dark forces by Caitlin R. Kiernan, follows those two beauties with an array of gashy gems from such towering pros as Gaiman, Brité, Etchison, and Newman to keep the reader bug-eyed, and wraps the collection up with a novella by Ramsey Campbell written from the heart (one can tell), depicting an only slightly exaggerated version of the agonies of an author on tour. I shall hereby permanently place it on my personal short list of the most desparingly funny horror stories I have ever read. What



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I'm saying is that Jones really manages pulls it off in high style and that *Keep Out the Night* really is a successful continuation of the *Not at Night* series. No small achievement. And there's another one forthcoming!

**Beware!** (edited by R.L. Stine; Harper-Collins, NY; hardcover; 214 pages; \$11.99) is presented as a one-shot anthology of genuinely spooky fantasy for children, but it would be very nice if Mr. Stine could be persuaded to continue it as a regular series since this very well assembled collection of fiction and drawing will most certainly incline a lot of kids onto spooky stuff and I'm sure a regular yearly dose of material of this high a quality very well might permanently lead them to becoming discriminating lifelong consumers of this sort of thing. The selection is very entertainingly varied and ranges from beloved masters such as Ray Bradbury and Roald Dahl to slightly grimmer authors such as Bram Stoker (intelligently adapted for the intended audience by Stine), includes grand over-the-top poetry by Robert W. Service and Shel Silverstein, and even tosses in a complete graphic episode, "A Sock for Christmas," from the moldering pages of the once-banned *Vault of Horror* comic book of olden times. All that and much, much more. I suggest that, as a responsible, civic-minded adult, it is your patriotic duty to buy one for your beloved young to ensure you've helped to set them on the right track! Of course it goes without saying you'll want to secretly read the book for yourself before the little darling messes it up with his or her crayons.

Gahan Wilson

**Summerland**, Michael Chabon, Talk Miramax Books, NY, hardcover, 512 pp., \$22.95.

Michael Chabon's last novel, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, was a hilarious and heartbreaking tale of two young cousins who dream up a superhero called The Escapist and in the process jump-start the Golden Age of Comics. Winner of the 2001 Pulitzer Prize, the novel lived up to its hyperbolic title thanks to Chabon's infectious passion for the history and mythology of America. Now he channels that passion into an ambitious young adult fantasy also filled with amazing adventures.

*Summerland* is no Harry Potter-come-lately. Instead of drawing primarily upon British/Celtic mythology and folktales, Chabon looks to the myths and legends of Native Americans, Vikings, and later immigrants to these shores, creating a melting-pot fantasy that can be enjoyed by children and adults alike. While its archetypal underpinnings are universal, its specific details and pervading spirit are as American as the national pastime, baseball ... which, as it happens, is at once the novel's central, unifying metaphor, its structural model, and the source of its most potent magic.



Eleven-year-old Ethan Feld and his widowed dad, inventor of the "affordable family airship," live on Clam Island, Wash., a locale even more rain-soaked than the rest of that soggy state ... save for one corner, called Summerland, where the baseball field is situated, and where it never, ever rains. Until, one day, it does.

This anomaly signals the imminent destruction not only of the Middling—that is, Earth—but of the three other Worlds that, as Ethan learns from a werofox named Outbelly, lie along the branches of the Tree of Worlds. The Summerlands are home to ferishers, fairies of distinctly Native American aspect. The Winterlands belong to the ferishers' immortal enemy, Coyote, a devilishly smooth-talking shapeshifter intent on killing the Tree, unmaking the Worlds, and starting over with himself as the Big Cheese. Coyote has trapped the current Big Cheese, Mr. Wood, in the remaining World, known as the Gleaming. Now nobody can stop the wily Coyote ... except Ethan.

At first hesitant to believe the ferishers, much less help them stop Coyote, Ethan's reluctance vanishes when Coyote kidnaps Mr. Feld. Then, faster than you can say "Play ball!" Ethan and his two best friends jump aboard one of Mr. Feld's airships and head off to rescue him ... and,

while they're at it, save the universe.

What this mostly involves is playing a lot of baseball. Baseball, it turns out, was invented by Coyote, but it's now the lingua franca of all the Worlds, played obsessively by ferishers, giants, sasquatches, werebeasts, and legendary figures like Paul Bunyan. Even the bad guys play it. And the magic of baseball is so potent that Coyote himself must abide by the decision of a game—which, as you might suspect, is an important plot point. Ethan, the kind of truly awful baseball player who makes even the Lucy van Pelt of the world look like All-Stars, must

somehow become an All-Star himself.

Chabon's writing never sings, zings, or stings like it does when he's writing about baseball, and these games, like tall tales that keep getting more outrageous, are recurring high points, each one played for higher stakes than the last. Unfortunately, the glitter of the games cannot disguise—not for five hundred pages—the fact that they are set pieces in an otherwise familiar, if skillfully executed, plot. Also problematic is the author's mix of mythologies, which often has a grab-bag feel to it, as if not fully thought out. Despite his name, for example, Chabon's Coyote owes more to Norse than American Indian myths, and the ferishers, notwithstanding their feathers and war paint, reminded me more of Brooklyn stickballers than either fairies or Indian braves.

Such (so to speak) errors may rob Chabon of a home run, but he still hits a solid triple. Reading *Summerland* made me believe, for one brief, shining moment, in baseball. Now, *that's* magic.

**Dragonstar**, Barbara Hambly, Del Rey Books, NY, hardcover, 292 pp., \$24.95.

*Dragonstar* is the fourth novel in Barbara

## Robin McKinley Is Reading ...

I have about eight feet of books I'm currently reading—two two-foot piles by my side of the bed and two two-foot piles by my kitchen chair. I heartlessly measure how good a book is by how often it moves through its pile before I finish it.

I'm finally lurching to the end of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* by Michael Chabon. This has taken me three tries. Pulitzer or no Pulitzer, I think at half the length it would have been brilliant.

*Seabiscuit* by Laura Hillenbrand is a terrific one-go book. My husband Peter gave it to me for Christmas last year but I've been saving it so I could look forward to it.

This has made me become all horsey again so I'm reading *Blessed Are the Foals* by Phyllis Lose, VMD. I'm also finishing *The Ape and The Sushi Master* by Frans De Waal (second try), which is fascinating on the subject of the existence of animal culture (very delicious to those of us who always knew it existed while all the lab-coat scientists were saying No, no, never, ugh!) but organizationally rather a mess.

The book that's living in my knapsack for train reading etc. is Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*. I love her stuff: simple, clear, and devastating.

(I also read murder mysteries like eating pretzels, have occasional, erratic binges of SF&F and kids' books, and subscribe to too many magazines.)

Hambly's powerful *Winterlands* quartet, a gritty, stark, emotionally harrowing fantasy that delves more deeply and honestly into the corrupting influence of evil—and what resources the human heart has to draw upon in combating it—than is customary in works that feature dragons, witches, gnomes, and demons. This riveting series has had to fight an uphill battle to find and keep readers, mainly because it's taken Hambly 16 years to complete the saga of the scholarly dragonslayer John Aversin; his wife, the witch Jenny Waynest; and the dragon, Morkeleb the Black. That's an awfully long time to hold onto a readership.

The first three books of Hambly's quartet wrenchingly trace the disintegration of a family, a marriage, and a world. Demons have infiltrated the *Winterlands*, taking possession of the bodies—and powers—of dragons and mages. Jenny is enslaved by a demon that drains her magic and abuses her body. John is forced to serve a rival demon. Not even Morkeleb is safe. And though Jenny and John win their way to freedom, scars of bitterness and shame poison their lives and their marriage. Some have accused Hambly of being too eager to inflict pain on these characters, but the only truth to this criticism lies in its backhanded acknowledgment of her skill in creating characters worth caring about.

The despairing arc of the first three books seems set to continue in *Dragonstar*, which opens with John condemned to burn for consorting with demons, and Jenny poisoned and near death. Instead, Hambly puts her broken characters back together with the same mesmerizing rigor and sensitivity she employed in taking them apart. Focusing on what is surely one of the strangest *ménages à trois* in literature (a man, a dragon, and the woman who loves them both), Hambly combines a plot full of twists and turns with an account of demonic addiction and recovery that is as compulsively readable as it is psychologically acute. My sole quibble is that events seem rushed at times, giving the impression of an author hurrying to tie up loose ends. Even so, *Dragonstar* is a worthy conclusion to a superior fantasy series.

**The Alchemist's Door**, Lisa Goldstein, Tor Books, NY, hardcover, 286 pp., \$23.95.

History supplies the raw materials for Lisa Goldstein's latest, a fantasy set mainly in the city of Prague during the 1580s, when the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolph II, invited alchemists to his court there. Dr. John Dee, astrologer to Queen Elizabeth, sought the emperor's patronage for "experiments"—performed with the assistance of alchemist Edward Kelley—involving communication

with angels. At the same time, Rabbi Judah Loew, credited by legend with creating a golem to protect local Jews from persecution, lived in Prague's Jewish quarter. "It is not recorded that Dee and Loew ever met," states Goldstein in a prefatory note. "But it is not recorded that they didn't...."

In Goldstein's alternate history, magic is ebbing from the world, but enough remains for Dee and Kelley to conduct their investigations. Dee, blind and deaf to the angels that appear to his partner, longs to see them for himself. Kelley, an amoral opportunist, resorts to a dubious spell to make this happen; instead, a demon is summoned. To escape the demon, Kelley and Dee, along with Dee's wife, Jane, and their children (one of whom may be possessed), flee England: first to Poland, then Prague.

There Dee and Loew strike up a scholarly friendship that turns more active when the rabbi discovers that the legend of the *lamed-vavniks*—36 virtuous men who exist anonymously in each generation, without whom the world will founder—is true, and that one of them is living in Prague, unknown even to himself. Rudolph decides that if he can find this man and kill him, he can remake the world in his own twisted image.

Divided by faith and experience, Dee and Loew must work together to find the *lamed-vavnik* first. To protect himself and his community from the emperor's minions during the search, Loew, with Dee's help, creates the golem, which soon demonstrates a penchant for free will. Meanwhile, a mysterious crone is shadowing Dee; Kelley is playing a dangerous double game; and Rudolph's sister, rumored to bathe in the blood of virgins, is hatching schemes of her own. As if all this weren't enough, the demon shows up again.

The strands of this overbusy narrative never quite come together. Important subplots—golem, sister—are suddenly dropped. Journeys of weeks or months are related as if completed in a fraction of that time; by airplane or automobile, a disjunction that extends to characters as well. Neither Loew nor Dee seems a man of his time and culture; rather, they are men of *our* time. John Crowley, in his *Aegypt* series, presents a more convincingly imagined portrait of Dee and his milieu. Crowley also does better with Goldstein's central conceit: the idea that the conceptual changes of the scientific revolution were actually material changes in the nature of reality. *The Alchemist's Door* is not a bad book but, given Goldstein's talent, it should have been a much better one. ♦

Paul Witcover



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# The ICE is SINGING

BY JAMES PATRICK KELLY ILLUSTRATION BY LAURIE HARDEN

**T**he man in the ice is wearing a blue three-piece suit. He is facing up at you and the bright sky and his eyes are open. What does he see? Nothing. He's dead, no? You look around the lake. None of the other skaters seem to realize that there's a man frozen in the ice on Christmas Day. Someone could do a sit spin right on his nose, a triple lutz from his head to his black, tasseled loafers. Except nobody on the lake is that good a skater. Certainly not you.

The ice is singing today. It whoops under strong light and moans when the sun goes behind a cloud. Something to do with expansion and contraction. Beth called the sounds whale songs. You think they'd have to be whales the size of skyscrapers. Sometimes the ice cracks under your weight with a sound like a gunshot, but don't worry about falling through. It's thick here, thick as a man.

So what to do about your man in the ice? You are already thinking of him as yours. No one is going to find him, way over here in Brainard's Cove. The Brainards are summer people. They're in Lauderdale, waiting for the early-bird dinner special at the Olive Garden. Is the Olive Garden open on Christmas? You could dial 911, but it's a little late for CPR. His skin looks gray against the white button-down shirt. One of those Escher ties, green geometric birds turning into blue fish, tucks into the vest. Now that you're branch manager, you wouldn't mind having a three-piece suit.

Then why didn't you tell Beth? She buys all your clothes.

The man in the ice isn't going anywhere and you're cold. It takes you 20 minutes to skate home.

The house is full of Beth's absence. You should have bought a tree anyway. String the damn lights. It wasn't as if you couldn't find the ornaments. They're in the attic, behind the golf clubs. Next to the unopened presents you piled there. If she were here, there would be sugar cookies and a turkey and the ghost of Bing Crosby would be on the couch, drinking her eggnog.

You try to imagine how a man could get caught in the ice like that. If he were dead, he'd sink to the bottom. And even if he were floating, wouldn't he be face down? When you were a kid, summering on the lake, you perfected the dead-man's float. You actually got your grandma to scream once. Maybe your man lies down on the ice. He's tired after a long day of

selling single-premium deferred annuities or designing large-span roof trusses or calculating the useful lives of general fixed assets. His body is warm; he melts into the ice. Then it closes over him.

Maybe it's a miracle. *A Christmas miracle.* Yeah, right.

Or maybe you're fucking crazy.

The walls of your home office are the color of walnut shells. That was Beth's favorite joke. "I see you're in a brown study," she would say. You can picture her in the doorway, hip cocked against the jamb. How many times did you kiss her there? The moose framed on the wall was never amused by her joke. Neither was the otter or the winged blur you're sure is a bald eagle. Beth gave you a digital camera for your 34th birthday. You need to repaint your office soon. This spring, when the weather warms up. You sit at the computer and type *ice* into Google. You read about black ice and snow ice and water ice and large-grain ice and small-grain ice and cobblestone ice. There is nothing about businessman ice.

One of the Web pages is put up by an ice-boating fan named Steph. She graduated two years ago from the University of Montana and is working as a librarian in Kalispell. She collects erasers and stamps. You stare at pictures of her wedding and her honeymoon. There she is standing next to her ice boat. She's wearing a tight, red jumpsuit and a black

*Continued on page 70*





As Robert Frost said, For purposes of destruction,  
ICE IS NICE, AND WILL SUFFICE.

# BLINK

BY THOMAS SEAY  
ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL GIBBS

Gary was on the train when he awoke, holding his left arm for God knows what reason, leaning his head against the window and trying not to think, just the way he'd always done when he was on his way back to college after a weekend at home some 20 years before.

What was he doing here?

Two girls sat in the seat in front of him, chatting to each other, laughing. Each cradled a backpack in her lap.

One of them—the one on the right, the pretty blonde—said, “I was so sad when I heard that Bryan died.” She smiled widely, and sounded delighted.

“Bryan?” said the one on the left. “What happened to Bryan?” She was smiling too.



**"LIFE** is what happens while you're busy making other plans." So, apparently, is **DEATH.**

What were they doing here?

In the window, Gary could see the reflections of tunnel lights. The train wasn't in a tunnel: It was daylight outside, in the middle of spring, and the flowers were all in bloom.

"Didn't Bryan have a heart attack?" the blonde said.

"Oh, no!" said the brunette, the one on the left. "That was Gary. Gary had a heart attack."

"Gary? The short guy? The mean one?"

"Yeah, that's him."

Why were they smiling?

"Oh! I thought it was Bryan, the tall, nice one. But if it was Gary ... I mean, that's still sad. But it's just not as sad, I mean, it's not as sad as if it were Bryan."

The blonde turned to face Gary, and as she turned, she became a friend. Her sharp nose shrunk back into her face, and her eyes faded to brown, and her hair grew down to her shoulders, and she was Maria. When was the last time Gary had thought of Maria?

"Hiya, Gary," she said. "It's been a while."

"Only a few decades," Gary said.

The brunette turned around, and her face molded itself as Gary resolved it in his memory: Trisha, that was the one. She said, "A few decades, a few centuries, a few seconds. It's all the same to us in here." And then her smile finally faltered as she said, "Oh, Gary, did you hear the news?"

"What news?" said Gary.

"Gary is dead," said Trisha.

"I know," said Gary. Then he added, "My wife and daughter will be here in a minute."

"I don't think so," said Trisha.

The train entered a tunnel, and in the window Gary saw the reflection of endless acres of trees, their autumn leaves turning to red and orange and brown.

"It's sad," Gary said. "I really liked him."

Trisha smiled again. "I didn't. He was mean. And short. I don't like short people."

As she turned around, a police officer came ambling through the aisles, glancing from one passenger to another without paying much attention to any of them. The radio attached to his belt squawked with static and a voice coming through it said, "That's the one."

The officer looked at Gary and said, "That one?"

"Yeah, him," squawked the voice.

Trisha glanced at the officer, then patted Gary on the shoulder. "We'll talk again soon. The in-flight movie is about to start." She turned back to face the front of the car.

The police officer pointed to the seat next to Gary. "Do you mind if I sit down?" His eyebrows were gray, and his breath smelled like snow.

"Not at all," Gary shifted closer to the window.

The officer sat down. "I've been looking for you for quite a while." He put his arm around Gary. "I'm the reason for the universe, by the way. I don't know if we've been introduced."

"Are you God?"

"You can call me that, if you like," God said.

"A pleasure to meet you."

"No, truly, the pleasure's all mine."

Gary turned back to the window. "Where is this train heading?"

"Where you want to go," said God.

The train now rushed through the Duke campus, the summer sun beating down overhead as it rushed past the bulky brick engineering building. The operator's voice boomed from the overhead speaker: "The next stop is Room 212 Station, repeat, 212 Station. Exit here for Gary's dorm room, Gary's computer, Gary's closet, and for connecting service to Gary's roommate. This is Room 212 Station."

Gary stood up and swung his backpack over his shoulder. "This is my stop."

"If you say so," God said. He stood to let Gary pass. "I'll see you soon."

The train's doors slid open and Gary stepped out onto his head. Then the train sped on, through the walls and out into the warm night, which was filled with multicolored fireflies so numerous that the air shimmered like a Christmas tree.

"Have you read much Nabokov?" Gary asked his roommate.

His roommate stepped in through the open window. What was his name? Bryan, wasn't it? It had been a very long time indeed.

Bryan said, "Why would an engineering major read Nabokov?"

"I do," said Gary, "ever since I graduated, and I was an engineering major."

"Well, that makes sense, in retrospect," said Bryan. He pulled his chair away from his desk, jumped on top of it, pulled a tile away from the ceiling, and leapt into the crawl space overhead. "Ask me again in a few years," he said, and scuttled away like a beetle.

They hadn't seen each other in two decades, and that was all they had to say?

Gary lay back on his bed and stared at the sky, thinking. College had been the best time of his life, after all; he remembered staying up until midnight laughing and laughing with Bryan and Trisha and Maria and the others. He thought about that all the time. He loved thinking about that, about the time when he used to laugh.

Bryan leaned back over the ceiling tile to say, "By the way, did you hear that Gary died?"

"Yes I did," said Gary. "It's sad."

"I guess," said Bryan, and then he disappeared behind a cloud.

They had been engineering majors, all of them, and that was what they used to talk about. They used to talk about computers. They used to talk about all the things you could do with 300 megahertz of processing power, and they used to imagine dream computers with gigahertz processors. Silly, really, looking back on it all from 20 years later, when a gigahertz processor could barely run a toaster, but they'd had fun back then.

Gary didn't laugh much with his wife. He loved her, all right, loved her more than anything else, but they never laughed.

She knew Nabokov really well. Was insulted by *Lolita*, and liked *Invitation to a Beheading*—*Prin*, for God's sake. Who chose *Prin* as their favorite Nabokov?

Nabokov poked his head out from under the bed. "You know, man, *Prin* was pretty cool, I thought," he said. "I liked all the squirrels and stuff." Then he disappeared too, leaving Gary alone.

Trisha and Maria came by that night, and they talked about toasters powered by gigahertz processors.

**T**HE NEXT DAY WAS AN AUGUST, SO THERE WEREN'T ANY CLASSES. GARY SPENT MOST OF THE DAY in his dorm room, enjoying the weather.

He went to the local sushi bar with Bryan and had some pizza. As he pulled a pepperoni off with his chopsticks, he said, "It's great being back with you guys. It's been too long."

Bryan stabbed a noodle with his spoon and hit off the end. "I liked getting my driver's license, but even after that, my mom always drove when we were both in the car. Ever wonder why that is? Force of habit, I guess."

The waiter walked by, carrying a pager in his hand, the type they gave to guests while waiting for a table to clear up. He looked at the number on the pager, then at Gary. "Are you 212?" he said.

Gary pointed to his name tag, and the waiter nodded and sat down. "Are you getting tired yet?" the waiter asked. His breath smelled like snow.

"I like toasters," Gary said.

"They do have their advantages," the waiter said, adjusting his own name tag, which said *God*.

"What am I doing here?" said Gary.

"It's where you wanted to be," God said.

"I suppose so," Gary said. Then he glanced at his plate. "When I came here as an undergrad, I was never any good with chopsticks." He pulled

# "I'll SEE you in the morning" Gary said, and God waved GOODNIGHT.

a sausage from the pizza and said, "I've gotten better since then."

"So you have," said God.

"When will my wife and daughter be here?"

God took out his pocket watch, an old fancy golden kind, and examined it carefully before replacing it. "Never," he said.

"Why not?"

"You're where you wanted to be."

"I guess I am," said Gary.

He spent that night staring at his ceiling. Then he got up, turned off the light, took out a sheet of graph paper, and started drawing pictures.

He had never been a very good artist, so he plotted several intersecting parabolas and labeled them "Wife." Then he made some hyperbolas and called them "Daughter."

Then he turned the light back on and went back to bed.

He didn't sleep at all.

**W**HEN MARCH DAWNED, GARY DECIDED IT WOULD MAKE SENSE TO GO TO CLASS. HE BARELY remembered his schedule, but he noticed that he'd drawn it on his palm with a big black marker: 10:00 AM, *OBSOLETE AND BORING RUSSIAN WRITERS SUCH AS VLADIMIR NABOKOV*.

He really liked Nabokov, so he skipped the class and waited in the park for God to come.

She was a girl this time, perhaps 10 years old, taking her dog for a walk. When she saw Gary she let the dog run off and sat down next to him on the bench.

"Are you ready yet?" she said, and her voice was deep and old and smelled of snow.

"When will Wife and Daughter be here?" said Gary. "I'm starting to miss them."

"Of course you are," said God. "They'll be here never."

"Is that soon?"

"Whatever you say," said God.

Gary nodded. It all made sense, if you thought about it. He pulled on a warm sweater and said, "I haven't slept since I arrived here."

"No," God said, "I suppose you haven't."

"Why not?"

God scooted closer, as though to tell a secret. "Because then you'd be dead."

"Ah," Gary said, and smiled. "That explains a lot."

"I imagine it does," said God.

"So when did I die?"

"Not yet." God twirled her beard as the spring rains started pouring down. "You'll remember, if you think very hard. You were at the gym with your wife. You had a heart attack. It should kill you any moment now."

Gary smiled again. "Yes, that does make sense." He pulled out an umbrella to block out the harsh light of the moon. "When do I die?"

"Soon," God said. "Or never. Whatever you say."

"Why can't Wife and Daughter be here?" said Gary.

"Because you're not dead yet," God said. "When your life flashes before your eyes, you only see what you want to see. You're only

where you want to be."

"I miss Wife and Daughter," said Gary.

Trisha and Maria were running up now, wearing their graduation caps and gowns, trailing cherry blossoms behind them.

God stood up and turned to leave. "Are you tired?" she asked.

"I haven't slept at all," said Gary.

"Of course not," she said, "because then you'd be dead." Then she jumped into the swimming pool and sank to the very bottom.

Maria was the first to speak when she arrived: "Toasters are cool," she said.

"Yeah," said Trisha. "And by the way, Gary's dead."

They talked about toasters for a while, then Trisha and Maria dove into the lake as well.

Gary leapt in behind them, and landed on his bed in his dorm room. Bryan smiled up at him. "Are you back already?"

"Yeah," said Gary.

"Toaster," said Bryan, before starting back on his homework.

Gary jumped off the bed and onto his desk. He rolled up all his sheets of graph paper, the ones labeled Wife and Daughter. "Are you going to need these?" he asked Bryan.

"Not any time soon," said Bryan.

Gary skipped to his bookshelf and flipped through the card catalog. When he found *Pin*, he pulled it out and tucked it securely underneath his arm.

"I'm going to miss you," he told Bryan, "but maybe I'll see you there, too."

"Whatever you say," said Bryan.

Gary started to leave, but Bryan turned him around and said, "Don't you want to take your toaster?"

"You keep it," said Gary. "It'll be worth something someday."

Then he opened his door to the train station and sat down to wait for the next train.

It was a very cold night and the snow accumulated at a rate of a few inches a second. Gary huddled up and shivered, yawning.

The next day, when the snow was a foot deep, the train pulled up at last. It was an old-fashioned kind, pulled by a coal-burning engine and dragging dozens upon dozens of passenger cars. The door to a nearby car swung open, and the security guard said, "Come inside. It's much nicer in here."

Gary stepped inside, and it was very much colder there, but very much nicer.

There were no seats in the car, but there was a king-sized bed with an intricately carved headboard. It was surrounded by a red velvet curtain.

"I'll see you in the morning," Gary said, and God waved goodnight.


Gary pulled the bed's curtain aside, tugged off his shoes, tossed them onto the floor, and then lay down, yawning again.

The speaker overhead crackled, and the operator's voice said, "Next stop."

Then nothing more.

Gary pulled his pillow up to his head and nestled in deep, drawing the covers around him and up to his ears to keep himself cold. His energy was failing, and his left arm hurt again. But that was all right: He was really very tired.

"Goodnight," he mumbled into the pillows.

The bed shifted as a weight joined him on the other side. She put her arm around him and put her head on his shoulder, and his wife's voice whispered, "Goodnight. I'll see you in the morning." 

# LOST WOMEN

BY BILLIE AUL ILLUSTRATION BY HUGO MARTIN

WHEN YOU START SEARCHING THROUGH  
LOVE'S LOST & FOUND, YOU NEVER KNOW  
WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO TURN UP.

## **"And then he just disappeared."**

I'd heard this story before from a suburbanite college senior with Future Soccer Mom written all over her. She had lost Mr. Right somewhere between the second round of bed-and-breakfast and dinner-and-a-movie-Friday, and she had wanted to pay me to find him for her. I'd thrown her out on her ear. Told her to keep her tuition money, finish her degree in Post-Iccap Planetary Ecology, and stop trying to figure out the opposite sex. A. it was too complex and B. it wasn't worth it.

Now, a wraith-like Goth girl, pale as death—whether from anorexia and anemia or really good makeup I wasn't sure—was telling me about her lost lover, and she was drawing me in.

I stomped hard on my emotional brakes. Feeling sorry for my clients was not a good way to establish a professional relationship.

"Vampires do that, you know," I tried to put a slight sneer in my voice.

"Do what?" I'd interrupted her extolling Dmitri's virtues: his translucent pallor, his pale lips reddened with her blood, and she'd lost track of the general tenor of the conversation.

"Disappear." I paused to let that sink in. "It's one of the things they're known for. Turning into bats and mists, picking up and leaving town before someone finds out who they are."

"That is so pre-Flood." She sniffed. "Vampires are legitimate members of society. I bet you don't let anything in your veins that's not Vampire Inspected. And Dmitri was going to school nights, getting a degree in Chinese literature. There's no reason for him to vanish into thin air like that." This time she sniffed in misery and daubed her eyes, artistically smearing her mascara.

I admit it was having the desired effect on me. I too had loved one of the Underground Folk, once upon a time. I tried to be gentle.





Yeah," she sneered. "And sometimes consulting with a private detective is a waste of time. I would not be paying my hard-earned cash to have you find someone who wants to be lost. He's gone; it's not on purpose. Are you going to help me or not?"

I figured if she was wrong it was none of my business. I told her my fee, took a retainer, and got the details. Dmitri, six foot four, hair black as night, skin white as snow, yadda yadda yadda, had been living in an apartment in New Brunswick. He had disappeared six days ago, leaving all his stuff, including a vintage collection of blood, his coffin, and an unfed cat named Bram. My client, Anastasia—each "a" a breathy sigh—had checked with his boss at the Central New Jersey Blood Bank and Trust Co., his teachers and classmates at Rutgers, and his landlady, all with no results. She'd stayed in his apartment for four days to make sure he wasn't sleeping in his coffin. While he could survive without it, he complained that sleeping anywhere else, even her apartment, left him tired and lethargic the next night.

So all I had to do was find a tall, dark, tired-looking vampire among the 60,000 or so that inhabit the Hudson Flood Repulsion area. That was assuming that he hadn't taken the form of a bat or a mist or any of the other things vampires could turn themselves into. Detective work had certainly changed since the rising sea levels had forced the Underground Folk from their legendary abodes into the above-ground world that we humans had already overpopulated. With all the diversity laws passed in the '00s, there was no choice but to accept them as equal citizens.

At least no legal choice. That doesn't mean there weren't people who objected. But while you might be able to get a bunch of humans to hand together to criminalize magic, the movement tends to go nowhere when people realize it'll include Santa Claus, who's now settled in Ho-ho-usc and completely revitalized New Jersey industry. Then there were the dwarves and trolls who gave their lives to finish the Manhattan seawall before Hurricane Silas hit. And the fairies who got virtual reality working and brought "movie" making back to its birthplace in Edison. And the vampires who could detect bloodborne diseases with just a little taste and were willing to work for the contaminated pints. It didn't take long before the Folk had more allies than foes.

A smart detective would have gone over Anastasia's work again in hopes of finding a clue that she'd missed. Even if nothing turned up you could charge her the hourly rate for routine work. But Samantha Thompson isn't always smart that way. I had a hunch, and I thought I'd play it out. I made an appointment with Oberon, King of the Fairies.

I wasn't surprised to learn that he wasn't in his office when I arrived at the MirrorMirror Enterprise building in Edison two minutes late. After all, everyone knows that fairies don't wait. With directions from his secretary I tracked him down in a basement studio currently set up as a virtual cityscape. He was nowhere in sight when I entered. Knowing how easy it is to get completely lost in a virtual reality set, I stopped and listened. Finally I heard, "You call this an alien planet?" ring out and followed the sound of the voice until I discovered him outside an oddly pinkish-gray three-story stone building yelling into a cell phone. Despite my presence, he kept on yelling. "It looks like downtown Trenton."

I had to admit that, when I looked past the olive sky and the purplish setting sun casting mauve shadows on everything, it did indeed look exactly like Trenton.

He directed the cell phone to put the police headquarters on legs and then turned his attention to me. Between bouts of "Legs, legs, not eggs" and "Not table legs, damn it, animal legs of some kind," I filled him in on the details of my client's boyfriend's disappearance.

After iterating through giraffe, ostrich, and elephant legs, Oberon took a break from phone shouting to stare at me.

"What's all this got to do with me?" he asked.

"As I remember my Mother Goose, fairies have been implicated in

a number of kidnappings...."

"Exchanges. We exchange babies, or used to. Where do you think all your creative people came from?" Long, dry, yellow grass suddenly sprang up under our feet. He picked up the phone. "What's this grass doing on the sidewalk? I wanted elephant legs not the whole effing savannah."

"What about Tam Lin?" I asked when he paused to draw breath.

"Are his legs alien looking?" Oberon was clearly distracted.

"I don't know what his legs looked like. But you kidnapped him, and his lover had a really hard time getting him back. The m.o. looks pretty similar."

"That was half a millennium ago, not to mention pre-Flood." The building started lumbering slowly away from us and he was shouting in the phone again. "Why are those legs gray? Make them the same color as the rest of the building."

This wasn't getting me anywhere. I shouldn't have gone right to the top. I should have hung around the fairy bars, picked up gossip, got some tipsy insider talking. But since I'd broken up with Twi's, I haven't been able to make myself go to the old haunts again. I headed for the door.

"Hey—Sam, isn't it?" Oberon called me back.

"Yeah?" I put my best sneer behind it.

"You're Twi's friend, aren't you?"

"Yeah." I tried not to sound like I cared that he would use my name and Twi's in the same sentence.

"Fairies didn't do this one. Vampires just don't fit into our lifestyle. We do abductions for fun. It's amusing to watch mortals lose all sense of time when they eat fairy food. Vampires are immortal themselves, and they don't eat. It just wouldn't work."

I nodded, feeling foolish. I could have figured that out if I'd taken the time to think about it.

**THERE WAS A BANG,  
A PUFF OF SMOKE,  
AND THE HUMAN  
MALE DISAPPEARED  
IN FRONT OF MY EYES.**

He was watching me, making sure I got the point, but also sizing me up. "Listen, one of our studio employees has a similar case to your Goth girl. Why don't you go talk to Peasblossom?"

Peasblossom, despite the fairy name, turned out to be a troll who worked in costume mock-up and design.

Design was not a normal job for trolls, and you could see by his diaphanous attire and artsy manners that Peasblossom was more comfortable with the fairies than he was with his own kind. His screen saver, "I DO BELIEVE IN FAIRIES," rippled through about 110 shades of pink while he talked to me.

"Cal was just perfect. We met at a studio party. He works in the water scenery department, and we spent the whole time talking about the subtlety of drape and cascade effects. He had some great ideas for cross-feeding the algorithms. Anyway, we had a great night." Here Peasblossom blushed. "I called him a couple of days later. I didn't want to be pushy, even though I was sure he was the perfect guy for me. I suggested we meet after work for drinks at the Wand and Ball.

"We were having one of those great second date kinds of conversations. You know the ones where you don't really know what you're talking about because you're mostly just staring into each other's eyes. He got up to go to the john, and I never saw him again." He dabbed his hazel-black eyes under the granite protrusion of his brow ridge with a piece of chateausse organdy, which he'd picked up from a pile of samples on his work table.

I knew men had trouble with commitment, but that was a bit extreme. Still, what was likely to have happened to him in that space of time, except his getting cold feet and climbing out the bathroom window?

Peashlossom had obviously been pondering the same question. "He hasn't been back to work, and it's been almost a week. I can only think of one possibility." He pushed a stack of magazines toward me. I rifled through them: *Absolute Romance*, *Love Connection*, *Unequivocal Confessions*, a bunch more of the ilk, all with cover stories about alien abductions.

"You think he's been abducted by aliens?"

Peashlossom nodded.

It was certainly possible. The Wand and Ball was one of the new diversity harts that catered to a mixed group of humans and others. It was possible that any number of aliens had dropped in for a visit. Most of them were in geosynchronous orbit above Manhattan, trying to sell competing Greenhouse remedies to the U.N. But they had lots of goods and services to sell and certainly central Jersey, with the fairies' lock on the booming entertainment and toy industries, not to mention the troll mafia's control of any construction projects east of the Mississippi, was a place to do business. Whether they were abducting humans and/or Folk remained to be seen.

Still it was a lead I could follow up. I made note of Cal's full name, Caldwell Liffey, and his address in Edison and then asked to borrow the magazines. With that I headed across town.

**T**he Wand and Ball was done completely in diversity plaid, a designer's nightmare of criss-crossing lines of color. One evening in a fit of boredom, I'd attempted to sort out which color belonged to whom. I'd picked up Christmas red for Santa Claus, mud brown for the dwarves, granite gray for the trolls, and Kelly green for the leprechauns before I'd given up with hundreds of colors left to go.

The plaid made the place look as if someone had tried to cover up years of stains on the walls and upholstery by incorporating them into a design. Thw had always refused to come here on aesthetic grounds, and I could see why. He might be the New Jersey Magic Commissioner, but becoming a bureaucrat hadn't diminished his fairy tastes.

It was only three in the afternoon, so there wasn't much going on. There was a rotund woman in her thirtysomethings seated at a table near the door. She had a stack of tarot cards and a crystal ball beside her, so I figured her for a psychic. They were the diversity bars' equivalent of dancing girls. When I walked in, she was engrossed in reading a grimoire and muttering while placing small piles of leaves and twigs on the table in front of her. No doubt she was working on becoming a witch and practicing some spell for a class project.

At a table in the shadowy back of the bar sat two beings obviously engrossed in each other. One of them was a human or perhaps a human-shaped Folk. There wasn't enough light for me to even make out his/her gender. The other had tentacles. An alien then, probably a Glgmar. Maybe I could witness an abduction in progress.

I sat down at the bar where I could observe them without looking suspicious. I warned myself not to get too excited. It was probably just a business deal. But there was something about the way they were sitting that didn't look businessy at all.

I started leafing through the magazines. Most of them were first-person narratives of abductions, the standard tabloid stuff. One, though, was about someone who had actually witnessed their lover

being abducted by aliens. I read through the whole article only to find out that the abductee was an alien himself who had been hauled off by his own kind for some outer space legal violation that sounded vaguely like a combination of fraud and public lewdness.

This was getting me nowhere. I checked the back corner. The Glgmar and the Earthling were deeply engrossed in conversation, their heads almost touching. It had the makings of a long afternoon. I looked around for the bartender, but there was none in sight. I leaned over the bar and scanned the floor behind it. After all, some of the Underground Folk are short. Nothing. I rapped on the bar and said, "Barkeep" in what I hoped was an authoritative but not rude way.

"You have to rub the lamp." It was the bored voice of the psychic. I glanced around, found an ornate brass lamp on the bar, polished to an almost golden sheen. I rubbed it, and a djinn appeared.

"What can I get you?" His huge torso towered over me, bulky arms crossed, while his waist faded away into a cloud of vapor emanating from the lamp.

It's hard not to be impressed by an emerging djinn, but if you let them know that, all you get is attitude from then on. I resumed my perusal of the back corner, ignoring the presence above me and said, "Gimlet."

"Ahh, another detective." The gimlet materialized at my right elbow.

Sometimes I wonder if I enjoy gimlets enough to continue looking like a stereotype. "Must be because this place is close to our union hall." I glanced again at the couple in the corner. No change. The witch candidate, however, had gotten a brazier going and was burning copious amounts of plant life. This spell certainly was taking a long time.

The djinn leaned over me, cutting off the light coming from the overhead fixtures. "Which one are you looking for?"

Attitude will only get you so far, especially when someone else has already been asking questions, so I let my interest show. "There's more than one?"

The bartender unbent, produced a towel out of thin air and started polishing the glassware. "How much is it worth to you?"

I sighed. Djinns were very hard bargainers. "What do you want?" I countered.

"A copy of the *Soap Opera Guide*."

I blinked. "What?"

He pouted. "I don't get out much. I need some drama in my life." I looked at his brass lamp and realized that unless someone carried him around, he didn't get out at all, not even to the newsstand down the street. He crossed his arms on his chest and looked down at me. "This week's *Guide*. It's my final offer, take it or leave it."

I almost went for it, but you're never supposed to take a djinn up on his first offer. So I countered, "I've got something better." I dealt the copy of *Undeniable Truths* off the pile and let him see the headline. His eyes got big, and I knew I had him. "How many disappearances have there been?" I asked.

I moved the magazine toward him. He covered it with an enormous hand and then lowered his voice conspiratorially, though his head was still at least a foot and a half above mine. "At least two. Some really clean-cut human college kid was sitting right here telling me about this wonderful girl he'd met the week before, gets up to go to the john, and never comes back again." I wondered if that was Future Soccer Dad. "Then a few days later a troll and a fairy come in. Obviously new lovers. You know the sort, still slobbery around the mouth. They were sitting over in the far corner, like those two." I took in the corner with its current occupants and wondered where the Glgmar had been on the night in question.

The djinn continued. "It was a pretty hectic night, and I didn't pay much attention to them until the troll started wailing about losing his boyfriend in the john. I offered him a plunger but he just got huffy and flounced out. He's been in to cry in his beer a few times since."

He reshelled the last glass and started wiping the bar. "I swear folks are getting stranger every day. A few years ago, no self-respecting troll would have left the place without pulling up the plumbing

just to be sure his boyfriend wasn't stuck in it. But now everything is so tame." He rubbed vigorously at an imaginary spot in front of me. "I guess that's why I need romantic stories to keep me going."

I showed him *Absolute Romance*. "What about a vampire, name of Dmitri?"

The djinn took the magazine and shook his massive head, no doubt causing a disturbance in the upper atmosphere. "Don't know anyone by that name." He studied the ceiling fan. "Though we did have a blood drive last weekend. Took forever because the tester disappeared halfway through. They had to get a new vampire from the Bank. The first one left some stuff behind." The barkeep pulled an anthology of Chinese poetry out from under the counter. "I've read some of this. But it can't beat real stories." He started perusing the lead article in *Undeniable Truths*.

Suddenly he looked up. "Hey, do you think it could be alien abductions?"

I glanced sideways at the couple in the corner and motioned the djinn to lower his voice. "Could be."

He stared rather pointedly at the alien and its companion until I tapped him on the forearm. He started guiltily and returned his attention to me. "Wow. You're a lot cleverer than that other detective. He just thought the college kid had gotten cold feet."

I had to admit that except for the long absences from their jobs, there was nothing about any of these cases that made that scenario unlikely. If there hadn't been an alien in the bar, I might have given up on the abduction theory by now. This was not a straightforward case.

The djinn, sensing that I needed some time to think, went back to perusing the magazines. I pretended not to notice when he took the whole pile I'd borrowed from Peasblossom. I drank my gimlet and tried to figure out what to do next. Should I wait to see what the Glgimar did? It showed no signs of abducting anyone anytime soon. I had pumped the bartender for all he was good for, though there was still the psychic. But she was deep in her spell; interrupting her looked like a bad idea.

Maybe if I got Anastasia and Peasblossom together they could think of some angle I'd missed. I checked my phone card. Three calls left. What the hell, why not call Soccer Mom too? "Keep an eye on those two," I whispered to the bartender and headed for the phone in the foyer. All three of my deserted lovers were free, and I told them to meet me at the Wand and Ball as soon as they could.

When I reentered the main room, the student witch at the front table was clearly working up to the finish. She had candles going at the cardinal directions, the brazier was smoking prodigiously, and her muttering had reached a fevered pitch. I made a wide detour around her to avoid getting sucked up into whatever she was doing.

I returned to my seat. The djinn was staring fixedly at the alien and his friend.

"I think they're in love," he said.

The afternoon sun had penetrated their corner, and I could now clearly see that the Glgimar's tentacle was lovingly entwined with the fingers of what turned out to be a human male; its eyes seemed dewy with love. Though for all I knew Glgimar eyes went dewy with the thought of abduction. Or perhaps it was merely allergic to the smoke that was now pouring from the witch's brazier.

I was getting sappy myself with all the true love around me. Next thing I knew I'd be wishing I hadn't messed up things with Thws by asking him to wait. I grabbed my gimlet to take the last swallow. Just as the glass reached my lips, there was a bang, a puff of smoke, and the human male disappeared in front of my eyes.

I blinked. He was still gone. The alien was on its carrying appendages, its tentacles spread wide, screaming in a high-pitched falsetto, "Arnold, Arnok, come back." I wondered if it was some clever ruse to throw me off the alien's track, when I heard behind me a small, female voice say, "Shit."

I turned. The witch was sitting with a brazier full of ash, looking at the place that Arnold had only recently occupied. The alien must have felt the tension in the air. It turned, saw the stricken face of the woman, and pointed an accusing tentacle tip at her and said in a

rumbling bass, "You killed him."

It undulated menacingly toward her. She stood and backed away as I picked up my bar stool, ready to fend off the irate visitor from outer space. I prayed that the Glgimar weren't the aliens that could spit deadly venom 20 feet.

"I didn't kill him... I don't think." The witch was still backing up, making a warding sign.

I turned to her. "What do you mean, you don't think? Where did he go?"

The woman swallowed. "I don't exactly know." The alien made a low, menacing growl in the back of its throat. The woman looked directly into its glaring yellow eyes. "Were you very much in love?" she asked.

The alien suddenly crumpled into a sort of lumpy pile on the floor. "He was my one true love." Its eyes were moist again.

"Oh, dear," The witch said.

"Another one," I said at the same time. We looked at each other.

"How many?" It was a shocked whisper.

"Four, counting Arnold." I looked at the empty brazier, then back at the witch. "What exactly were you trying to do?"

"Banish true love." She looked very unhappy for someone whose spell had just spectacularly succeeded.

It turned out it wasn't such a success after all. As a final project for her American Coven Association certificate, she had been trying to banish the feeling of true love from those who had been deserted by their lovers. Instead she had caused the desertion of four true lovers who had been downwind of her experiments. A simple mistake, just a reversal of the order of a couple of words. Really easy to do. But not easy to fix. She'd been trying to undo it for over two hours now and she wasn't getting anywhere, though the bar's clientele, who had been drifting in after work, were enjoying the show immensely.

My clients, Peasblossom and Anastasia, were weeping copiously at the bar over Cal and Dmitri while the djinn soaked up the ambience.

Future Soccer Mom had arrived with her lawyer and had threatened to sue about four times already and was gearing up for another outburst.

It was the Glgimar I was most worried about, however. It was sitting in a corner, getting what looked like madder and madder, and I was beginning to think that it might be getting mad enough to spit.

Clearly the witch needed to try something else. I suggested she try a locator spell. If she could just find out where the missing men were, I could track them down the old-fashioned way.

Another circle was inscribed on the floor, crowding the observing bar patrons into the corners. The cardinal directions were saluted, their attending spirits summoned. Offerings were made, questions asked. There was a whoosh of uprushing air, which pulled anything of negligible weight to the center of the circle—incense, stray hits of paper with incantations, a pink paper umbrella from somebody's *piña colada*. It all sat there for a moment suspended and then disappeared, leaving a void.

Great. They couldn't be found. In essence they weren't anywhere at all. Maybe she *had* killed them. Though more likely they were hanging out in some undetectable limbo, probably swapping stories about how they'd just lost the loves of their lives. It was going to take some serious magic to get them back. Obviously the witch had figured this out as well. She was poring through her grimoire.

There really was no excuse for not getting Thws involved at this point. After all she was only a student; things could go seriously awry if she made any more mistakes. I started for the phone but remembered that my phone card was empty, except that was only an excuse. I just didn't want to see him. Peasblossom and Anastasia, now joined by the Glgimar, were sobbing and comforting one another. Their grief made me angry rather than sympathetic. Lots of people had lost true loves before. What made them special?

They were my clients, that's what. If I hadn't wanted the job, I shouldn't have taken it. I started for the phone again.

"I've got it." The witch had her finger on a spell and a look of triumph on her face. "I'll do a summoning."

I hesitated. Summonings could be dangerous, but if the victims were stuck someplace in the void, a summoning was probably the best way to bring them back. Still, if she did something wrong...

"Don't you think you should get some help?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I'm not going to do anything elaborate. There should be enough energy just among ourselves to get them to come back. If anything more is needed, I'll call in someone from the Commissioner's office."

That sounded safe to me. Clearly my clients and the others wanted their lovers back. If their energy was focused it should be enough to get them here without calling in Powers one couldn't control. And if it worked, it saved me from getting Tiws involved.

The witch hastily cleared up all of the detritus from the previous spells, and then with a broom that the djinn produced out of nowhere, she carefully swept the floor, erasing the marks of failed attempts and removing any stray debris.

"Now everyone who really wants to help find these guys, get in a circle and hold hands," she instructed. Soccer Mom stepped right up. She tried to drag her lawyer in as well, but he declined. Peasblossom brought the djinn in his lamp and Anastasia pulled me in. The Gligmar got everyone in a tangle by offering around more than two holding tentacles. Several bar customers who were heavily invested in the outcome stepped in to help straighten things out and ended up in the circle themselves.

We firmed up the circle as the witch lit a candle. "Focus on the light and concentrate on calling them back to us." I didn't really want to visualize Future Soccer Dad, but Dmitri and Cal had some substance and I'd at least seen Arnold. I focused on them.

She then murmured some incomprehensible words, followed by a chant in English. "Loose the lost loves." The chant was taken up by the circle.

I focused on the chant, letting a feeling of longing for an absent lover flow through me to the void, summoning the lost. Then I felt their presences: the Soccer Dad, curious and alert; Dmitri, hungry and tired; Caldwell, stressed and worn; Arnold, still fundamentally confused about where he was; and then I felt Tiws, who was really pissed. He'd been headed out for the evening when we interrupted him. I almost shoved him away, but realized that could ruin the spell for everyone. I tried to just ignore him but that didn't work very well either.

Meanwhile, my clients and their fellow victims were calling out to their beloveds. Obviously they felt the presences as well. I opened my eyes fully expecting to see Tiws, dressed in his tux, glaring at me. Instead the circle was completely empty.

They were here, but something was preventing them from being embodied. I felt Tiws refocus his attention from me to the student witch and the circle in general. He radiated confusion.

The witch took a couple of deep breaths, and then, stamping her foot, she shouted, "Appear."

Nothing happened.

What was holding them back? Their own true loves were waiting for them, except for Tiws that is, who had found someone else. Then I knew.

"They're afraid," I said.

There was general pandemonium from the folks in the circle which amounted to asking what their lovers could possibly be afraid of.

I waited for silence to reassess itself. "Look, you were all at the stage in a relationship where you start to notice the little problems that might mean big trouble later on. They've been isolated for a while and have had time to think about them and now they're not sure if they want to go on."

Peasblossom burst into tears. "What's wrong, Cal? What's wrong?" A disembodied voice said, "I hate apricot."

Peasblossom's head jerked up. "But my entire bedroom is done in apricot."

There was silence. Peasblossom's mouth worked for a moment, obviously contemplating whether he could stand to be with someone with so little taste. Finally he gazed steadily at the empty air. "What about if I redo it in cinnamon?" Caldwell, a skinny runt of a fairy, materialized, embraced as much of Peasblossom as he could get his arms around and the two of them left the circle.

"John?" Naturally Future Soccer Dad was a John.

"I hate children."

"What!?! How could you even think of dating me if you felt that way? I'll have my lawyer sue you." She pulled herself out of the circle and huffed out of the bar.

John materialized, a good-looking young man, with the air of an intellectual, rather than an athlete. I bet he hated soccer, too. He exited the circle and disappeared into the crowd around it.

"Arnold." The Gligmar didn't make it so much a question as a command.

"Ummm." The voice hesitated. "I've never been with a nongendered person before."

The alien visibly relaxed. "I have a teaching tape. Very well done. Several corporations have expressed interest in selling it to what they call the 'Adult Entertainment Market.'"

Arnold stepped out. "Then what's keeping us, baby?" He grabbed its tentacle and they exited the circle.

"Dmitri, I will not go through the age discussion again." Anastasia was tapping her foot in annoyance.

"But I feel like I'm cradle robbing."

"Anyone under 200 is going to feel like cradle robbing to you. Get over it."

Dmitri appeared. His pallor was even more deathlike than she had originally described it. "But don't you think..."

"I think you haven't eaten for a week and you haven't gotten enough sleep. Let's go."

The bar patrons dropped hands and resumed their previous seats. Anastasia and Peasblossom signaled me from the bar, no doubt wanting to thank me. I didn't move and neither did the witch. Her eyes shifted around the circle as if looking for something. "I think there's someone else here."

"I'll handle it. You can start packing up." I turned to the empty air in the middle of the now nonexistent circle. "Come on out, Tiws."

He appeared, wearing a pair of jeans and a very tight t-shirt. So it hadn't been a formal party, probably something private just between him and his new lover.

"You summoned me."

"Look, Tiws, it was a mistake. I should have called you earlier when we first realized the spell had gone haywire."

Tiws glanced at the witch then focused on me. "It seems to have been a rather effective summoning of lost loves to me."

**"WE'RE NOT GOING TO BE  
ABLE TO LEAVE THE CIRCLE  
UNTIL WE SAY WHATEVER  
HASN'T BEEN SAID."**

I swallowed. When he'd decided to move on, I thought I'd kept him from knowing that I cared. "It was the spell that got them lost that went wrong." I briefly explained my clients' problems and the witch's involvement.

"So, you were thinking of me in a professional capacity and I just ended up here? Come on, Sam."

*Continued on page 72*







# MOONBLIND

TO HUNT THE OTHER YOU MUST  
BECOME THE OTHER. BUT IF YOU LOSE  
YOUR WAY BACK TO YOURSELF,  
WHAT HAVE YOU BECOME?

His mother kept the inn, and he was a child when he saw it first, the Hunt. Evading his chores, he had escaped into a high loft, from where he found it easy enough to climb out on the roof. He lay along the thatch, looking down into the stony yard before the inn-house. Sunset had begun, the sky that night red from end to end. As the riders and the dogs assembled, all redness fell and caught on them, as if they had been doused in a shower of freshest blood.

There were 30 men, 30 horses, and 60 dogs.

The inn-maids went round with the cups of drink, finest silver cups, somewhat dented, that the inn kept solely for those 12 nights. Even on the roof, the child could smell the strong wine, and the pungency of spice and herbs stirred in.

He noted the powerful horses, and especially the dogs. These hounds were white and gray, long-haired, long-nosed, and bone-slim on long legs. All the men seemed loud and laughing, cracking jokes. Respected and revered, still they would boast of their participation in a Hunt. Already the child had heard how such men, wherever they went, whatever their birth or station in life, were treated like lords.

BY TAPITH LEE

YET ONCE MORE, FROM AN IDEA BY JOHN KALLPE

ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL LEE

Next the red sky changed to a clear plum darkness, and the moon came up over the woods, round and white, with freckles on her surface. The Hunt saluted the moon, standing in their stirrups.

Then they slung the drained cups away, as if worthless, ringing on the stones, and turning their horses' heads, at a sudden gallop raced from the yard, among a streaming torrent of dogs.

It was as they left the light and shadow of the inn that the moonlight instead caught them. What had flashed and dripped scarlet at sunfall now blazed up like a bonfire of molten silver. On the roof, the boy was dazzled, eyes and brain. Ten years later, dazzled still, he presented himself to the Hunt Master in the Big House on the hill.

"You'd be happier—and far more safe—staying on in your family's inn."

"So I've heard, but here I am."

"What of your poor mother? Don't you care how she'll fear for you? How will she manage if you're killed?"

"She'll manage. And I don't care a jot."

Perhaps approving his impudence, the Hunt Master called his servant. He had the boy sent at once to undergo the proper tests. They were difficult and terrible, and he passed them all. By the time he was 18, Kevariz, the inn-woman's son, was himself a member of the Hunt.

**K**evariz sat drinking at the inn.

He was 29 years old, and it was the night before Full Moon, and Tyana expected him home. However, his mother had said she wished to see him. Now, if he came to see his mother, it was always a visit, an occasion. He had brought her a rose-plant in a pot, and a little silver luck charm to hang on the rafters. She could brag that her son, who rode with the Hunt, had given it to the inn-house—but he doubted she would.

After the third tankard, he went up the cranky stair to her room above.

Of course he had been up here since his youth, but the room seemed every time more alien to him. Perhaps, even as a boy of nine or ten, it had been so—and all of the inn the same. He had thought himself made for another destiny.

"Mother. You're looking well."

"Yes, you prefer me to be well. It lessens your guilt in leaving me."

He put down the rose and the talisman beside it. She nodded. "Thank you," she said, stiff and cold.

"You sent your boy for me."

"I've had a Dream."

Three days after she Dreamed it, men carried the body, what was left—not much—home to her.

Kevariz met her eyes steadily now. She was a gray-haired matron, well-off and proud. She had never liked his leaving her, let alone leaving her for a Hunt. On days and nights he had come back from his training to help her at the inn, she treated him with scorn. Always she carped and chided, but never once had she said she did not want him to go, to please, please not abandon her and throw himself in the way of such danger. As a girl, she had elected to perform her Town Service in the silver mine, alongside the young men. Girls were never forced to do this, and few volunteered; they liked the softer work better, sorting the ore, or helping in the metal shops. But it showed her character.

He thought now, *She'll tell me she's Dreamed I'm going to die tomorrow.*

What if she did? It could make no difference. No man could resign from a Hunt, once he had joined it. Any who deserted before his 50th year was thrown in the jail to rot. It was like that everywhere.

"Well, mother," he said.

"I Dreamed," said Kevariz's mother, "that you had a son. No, don't interrupt me. He wasn't what you'd care for. He was a wolf."

"God's Silence, mother!"

She had at last managed to shock him.

Not since she had beaten him first, when he was five years old, had she knocked him back like this.

"Sit down," she said.

He sat, and she put one of the best pottery cups in his hand. It had brandy in it—she had kept it ready.

Kevariz drained the brandy.

She added nothing. It was her moment of triumph after all, 12 years waiting to pay him back, one year for every one of a year's Hunt Nights. It must feel as good as the strap had in her hand, when it rang on his shoulders.

"It was a true Dream, you'd say?"

"Yes."

She stood by the mantelpiece, and he sat turning the pottery cup.

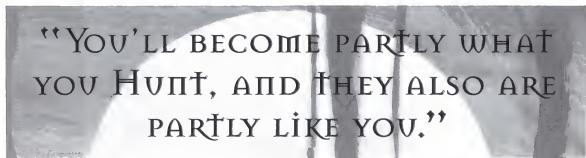
In the end he said, "I suppose you think Tyana's betrayed me with some—with someone who has the strain."

"She's your woman. What do you think?"

"Four years, we've taken care—we've no children. That suits me fine, and her too. So far as I know, she's never strayed from my bed."

"Better be sure," said his mother.

"All right." He spoke shortly. He got up. "Thanks for your warning. I must be going, tomorrow is—"



Kevariz waited. His mother, when she reported this, meant only a single sort of dream; one which was prophetic. She had had them now and then, and her Dreams were always of something bad, and usually they came true. She had Dreamed, for example, of the wolf which killed Kevariz's father, on his journey back from the south.

"I know what tomorrow is, Kevar. Haven't I watched you ride off at every tomorrow of Full Moon, in your silver, and on your horse and with your dogs?"

He would not look at her; he could hear the mockery and rage in her voice clearly enough. He thought, *Is it that she didn't want to lose*

me, or that she wishes she could take my place?

She was a hard woman, his mother.

Tyana was not like that, but wild and fey and loving, passionate and all for him. Or so he had thought.

When he climbed up the hill to his house, the lamp burned its yellow welcome in the window. Tyana was there, laying out the supper plates. Her hair was the color of copper, a fiery veil as she bent above the candles or the fire.

She came at once to greet him, shoving the two great dogs away so she could kiss him first.

Tyana seemed just the same. Her scent of warm flesh, cinnamon and mint, her hungry mouth, unchanged and solely his.

As they ate the food, he said, "Sergan's woman's in the family way again." And when Tyana agreed, he added, "You're not missing that, perhaps?"

Tyana laughed. "If No. I want only you."

"But a child, Tyana—"

"I've no fondness for children." She frowned, apparently uneasy. "Is it you that wants me to have children? I will," she said, "if I must, to please you. But I can care for you better if it's just the two of us."

After all, he saw the stubborn streak in her then. Of course, if he had insisted, by law she must obey and allow herself to conceive. She had taken up with a Huntsman, and knew the rules. But oh, he could tell, in that case he would have been made less comfortable. She would make sure of that.

But well, then, she was not presumably pregnant by some other, or she would have jumped at this excuse. Nor, he thought, would her reluctance let her get herself so.

"Why all this about children?" she asked.

Kevariz said, "I thought, sometimes, those times I'm away with another Hunt—you might like the companionship."

"No, because you leave the dogs with me then, and they're companions enough."

"You're too attached to the dogs. Dogs get slaughtered every Full Moon, somewhere or other."

Heartless despite her smile, Tyana said, "Then the Master would give you another pair."

We grow unfeeling, Kevariz thought later, as he lay beside a Tyana relaxed and sleeping after sexual love. *Heartless. Yes, I'm like that, too.* He was. He knew it. Though he *made* love with Tyana, he did not love her. Nor had he ever loved his mother. Neither did he love his comrades, nor, as some men did, his dogs or his horse, though he would groom them so carefully. *Do I like anything?*

Yes, he thought, *I like the Hunt. God help me. That's what I like and love.*

As for his mother's Dream—it could have been a lie—just her malice. She was getting old, nearly 50 herself. She was a woman.

He turned on his side and shut his eyes and for a moment was in the black-green forest, not riding but running, and there was fur on him, and he had four feet. Waking with a start, he lay an instant in suspended horror. Then it passed. They all dreamed things like that, once in a while. Had the Master not told him, told them all in the beginning, "You'll become partly what you Hunt, and *they* are also partly like you. But remember, they're of the earth, and *you* are of the world. That's what keeps you separate."

Kevariz the Huntsman was dressing for the Hunt, with the help of his woman, the excited dogs leaping about in the room below, barking, till he shouted for them to be quiet.

Tyana, very skilled after four years, laced him into the linen and leathers, helped push on his boots. She plaited his hair, added as she did so the silver ribbons that must mingle with the

braids. She had scrubbed his back in the iron bath, and shaved his jaw and cheeks with care. There must not be a nick on his face, nor any open cut anywhere on his body—if any were found, the wound must be cauterized with a hot metal rod and sealed by wax. She was adept at all of that, Tyana. But really, all the women on the hill were adept. They had had their training, too.

After the dressing and hair-braiding, Tyana opened the chest and undid the box. She performed this duty with ceremony, as Kevariz sat like a prince in his chair.

The box was of black-lacquered wood, inset with palest mother-of-pearl in a design of leaves and crossed knives. When she undid it, the low sun splashed up again from what lay there. The box was full of silver, and piece by piece, with the correct attention and reverence, Tyana brought the pieces out and laid them before him, and then, as he selected, she put them on his body.

Through the piercings in his ears and nostrils and chin went the silver studs and rings. Around his neck and wrists, and over the ankles of his boots, were clasped the larger rings. Into the lacings of his garments silver chains were threaded, and done up with silver locks. Silver buttons were attached to his coat, not by thread, but with silver claws. On to his fingers slid 10 silver coins set in silver. Then he stood up, and raised his arms, and around his waist was cinched the great belt of silver plates, each with its hammered crescent moon, but the buckle was shaped like the sun. Penultimate from the box, out from under a velvet cloth, the woman drew a pistol of white bone chased with silver, a silver-handled knife, and long, incised, silver-hilted dagger.

"There," she said. "We're almost done."

And finally then, almost slyly, like a secret treat put by for a child, she drew from the bottom of the box the velvet bag and handed it to him. Kevariz himself loosed its drawstrings. He shook into his palm the cache of silver bullets.

"How beautiful you look," Tyana said. Her eyes glowed, catching the glimmer of the silver. "As if the moon had rained white fire on you."

She always said similar things. She wanted sex then against the wall. This frequently occurred at that hour, and not only with them, but among other couples on the hill. He gave her what she wanted, it took little enough out of him, because at such times she was quick as any man.

Downstairs, the dogs were already dressed. He had seen to it as always, when earlier he groomed them. They, too, had their earrings and studs of silver, their collars. Their legs had thin silver rings, their claws were painted thick with silver, and silver wires were fastened in the long hair of their backs.

Out of the door they walked, he and they, along the hill, to the Big House.

The houses of Huntsmen clustered the hill, each with its grove, its little orchard, vineyard, kitchen-garden, which the servants and women tended. No one went without any good thing here. There was always plenty of food, and sufficient drink, women, fine clothing, even books if desired.

In the late afternoon light, dense and rich as amber honey, the trees were dark, and where the workers stood to watch, they clapped their hands and waved the men on.

All the Hunt was pouring up toward the Big House. Fifty men this season, and a hundred dogs. From the stables on the hilltop the horses, readied like the dogs that morning, neighed and stamped, calling and eager to be off.

As the Huntsmen greeted each other, at first sober, brief, and businesslike, the grooms began to lead their horses out.

Kevariz saw his gelding appear, black as any night, and with a moon-white mane and tail—a classic horse he had bargained with the Master for, three years ago, after the original horse was eviscerated in the woods. The gelding also had silver through its ears,

silver hells plaited in its mane, silver embroidery on the saddle-cloth, and flat studs fixed through the saddle. While over stirrups and the iron hoods, silver was newly plated. This was common with all the horses.

He took the hridle from the groom. Among a crowd of men who did the same, he stroked the face of his horse, the long arch of neck, and the bells shook and made their faint sound. Up into the saddle Kevazir sprang, and the two tall dogs pranced around the horse, as all the dogs did—well-behaved now, used to the mounts, and to each other since they had kenneled together in their puppyhood, and run out together ever after. Only if sent to some other Hunt Meet must a man leave his own hounds behind. He must take loan of the wolfhounds of the Hunt that required him, to save the dogs quarreling. Kevazir had never minded this, providing the loaned animals were healthy and well got-up.

Golden light played on silver. Kevazir recalled how he had seen it first, all that metal hazing in the moonshine. Dazzled, still dazzled. It had been easy, in a way, to be brave and single-minded, and to forego almost every other thing.

Just then the door of the Big House opened and the Master came out in his blood-red brocade coat and antique silver adornments passed, father to son, for 16 generations.

The men cheered the Master. They always did. He howled to them, as always too, and the servants and grooms clapped again.

"It's a fine night," called the Master, "a clear moon white as starch. We've heard, haven't we, there's one main pack this month, down by the river road. It's those we'll take. And any stragglers. Not too unworthy a job of work."

The first cups went round. These were made of black bronze, and the wine had accordingly a bronze tang. Sergan said, joking, "It'll taste better at the inn."

Kevazir considered his mother a moment, when they were in the inn yard. He puzzled, did she truly spy on him, unseen, from a window?

Why had she told him that stupid fool's rignarole?

Probably because it could haunt him forever, if he let it. For there were other women he had and could sleep with, and any one might announce she was to give him a son.

One day—one *night*—they would have wiped the strain, this strain of Hell, out. Scoured it off the face of the earth. So they always swore.

He put his mother and her Dream from his mind.

It was the earliest training, to be able to clear the brain on a Full Moon Night.

The sun sank into the land. The inn wine had been consumed. They saluted the rising moon. They flung away the silver cups, symbol of their own recklessness in the matter of their own lives, rode for the woods and the forest, flying now, the hounds, horses, and men. This was what Kevazir knew best; this fearful time, strangely, was when he felt the most secure.

**T**he dogs started the first one down by the old mill-pond.

As they tore around the tarn, with its water-wheel standing obsolete now, in a moonlit verdigris of moss, across the clearing there loped something thin and white.

The hounds were belling, yowling. The men shouted excitedly.

The moon-haze of silver was all around, and through it, as if through an iridescent fog, Kevazir made out the shape of the wolf as it sped away, threading itself like an ivory needle hack into the trees.

But the dogs were hot on its heels.

The Master yelled. They broke across the clearing and pelted down the ancient overgrown road beyond the ruined mill. Ten years since that mill had been in use. One night, the mill folk had died, all of them, murdered and eaten. There was barely enough left lying about for the town to identify. But this was what wolves did, a wolf-pack,

and usually they were in packs. This individual, running in front of the hounds, though solitary, would he making for the familial lair.

Now the creature ahead, wanting more speed, dropped to its four feet—that was, what passed for feet. It bounded, ungainly, appalling, swift, leaping across obstacles along the road, the upthrust paving, the tussocks of weeds and bramble clumps.

Kevazir had seen every action it made before, and countless times. He kicked at his horse's sides, howling like the dogs, longing to catch up to their quarry and have it down.

But as usually happened, the dogs got there first, catching the wolf in the second it swerved and tried to head off again into the deeper forest, away now from where the river was and the lair.

It had made no sound until then, as the dogs sprang on it. When the hiting fangs and silvered claws sank in, it began to emit the noises of its fury and agony—a horrible and filthy guttural screeching and growling.

The dogs swarmed over their captive. Huntsmen rode forward into the melee. It was strong, the wolf, as always. One dog was flung up and over, just like the silver cups in the yard—spinning, dented, and silent—broken. One of Kollia's pair, Kevazir vaguely thought, his gelding stampeding forward shaking its head. The bugle yapped, calling the dogs away. As they let go, sprawling down, the guns were out, and their voices harked in turn.

The bullets spat forward in stinging silver jets. Kevazir saw his own shot go home, deep into the shaggy face of the thing writhing now, bloody, wrecked, and refusing to die, there on the forest floor.

Kevazir found himself out of the saddle. He ran in. Into his hand, almost before he expected it, came the great coarse ruff. He pulled the head upward, and felt the claws of the beast scrape at him, sliding on leather, burnt by silver, gouging the flesh between. "*Good night, shitspaun.*" Kevazir plunged the long silver-hilted dagger in at the side of the neck, through fur and skin, flesh and skeleton. He heard the spine crack, felt it, saw the knife reappear on the neck's other side. The beast sagged. Its eyes, black as the darkness, each holding a miniature of the moon, stared into his. They looked blind, blind as his own.

The thing was dead.

Kevazir stood off. Hands clapped him on the back, and a flask arrived. He swallowed brandy, as in his mother's room. Then they were all up in the saddles again, the living joyous dogs, hearded with blood, yipping for more, and the bugle summoning them on, for the rest.

Where the river opened up the forest, in places the hanks were steep and full of holes and caves. Frequently this was where they chose, the wolf-packs, to lair. As the Hunt had been told, tonight it was the same.

Two males came bounding out, one nearly pure white and one much browner. They leapt at the horses, straight up, and Kevazir saw Zivender's mare fall shrieking, even as Ziv seized the monster's hair and stuck in his knife. Then they were lost in a kaleidoscope of limbs and weapons.

A female came out next, after the males were down. They had heard this pack comprised four or five members, which meant, when the dogs had also got the female down, and the Master himself had ridden over to dispatch her, that one more beast might still be inside the cave.

Presently, as the shouts and shots died away, and the burling growling was silenced, they heard the final wolf, there inside the hank. It had begun howling, enraged, or frantic, but it did not come out.

The hounds were fierce, their blood was up, and the same for the men. The Master pointed. Sergan, and Ziv, who had struggled off his dying horse unharmed, but weeping with sorrow and anger, scrambled up the bank, their four dogs moving belly-down beside them, like snakes. They all vanished in at the maw of the cave.

Utter quiet was maintained outside. The Huntsmen there waited,

guns positioned, their well-trained horses rock-still, so even the hells made no noise, the dogs crouched ready yet motionless.

The interior hubbub of hattle was brief. The last wolf was one against six. Though these things had the strength of devils, seldom could even the larger packs of 10 or more do much against the amalgamated might of a Hunt, protected by its silver—for which any town's youth were prepared to die in the mines—armed and organized like warriors for war.

## TO THE UNACUSTOMED EYE, IT LOOKED ONLY LIKE A BABY.

After a few minutes the disturbance in the cave stopped, Zivender and Sergan's dogs instead layed in triumph. They alone, having entered the lair, would be allowed the hearts and livers, the rest of the bounds must make do with a chop or two. The Master had done excellently, selecting Sergan for the honor, and Ziv, who had loved his horse as much as his woman, and would mourn her for months.

He was not the first to enter the cave. The Hunt Master had called to Kevariz, and embraced him for his bold kill of the previous wolf. Possibly, when they all dined that night in the hall of the Big House, the Master would publicly title Kevariz "son." They were related that way, because Kevariz lived with Tyana, one of the Master's own daughters, but it was always "son" not "son-by-law" that the Master titled Kevariz when he had been particularly effective in a Hunt.

The brandy had gone round once more. Next they would quarter the woods hereabouts, to be sure. But the reliable reports had only been of this one pack. As a rule there was at least one wolf to be dealt with every month. No sooner had a Hunt burned out a nest, than more of the creatures slipped into the area, often inadvertently driven in from other spots, by other Hunts. Only twice, in all the years Kevariz had been a Huntsman, had they ridden all night without a single kill.

It was Zivender who asked Kevariz to go into the cave.

"I've lost my pocket-watch, damn my carelessness. No, it's not on poor Sdina." Sdina was the dead mare. "It must have dropped out of my coat in the lair. It's silver—"

"I know," said Kevariz.

"My father gave it to me for my first Hunt. I'd go back in but I've got Sdina to see to, can't just leave her lying."

"I'll be glad to have a look for the watch. Do what you have to here." And so Kevariz climbed up to the cave.

The moon was going over by now, toward the west, and shone diagonally through the trees below, and across the inky water stretched a pointing finger of bleached fire.

So beautiful, the moon, that stirred up so much stinking dirt.

Kevariz had seen and entered other lairs. They were generally similar. Bones lay about, reeking and foul, though wolves, unless very old or sick, would empty their bladders and bowels elsewhere. There were always possessions in the lairs—sometimes a new Huntsman was unnerved to find a hairbrush or a doll. They had furniture too, many of them. Not the rough wooden stools and

mattresses stuffed with dried grass that were normally found, but wonderful things that perhaps had come from great houses—a carved chest, or decorated ebony chair. However fine, no man coveted them. The lair would be fired and burned out, and anything like that with it.

There was some furniture in this cave, but only of the crudely made sort. The bed, though, had a raised wooden frame, and he discovered the dogs and men had killed the last wolf on it. It was

another female, and initially he thought the copious bloodstains were only from the slaughter.

Ziv's silver watch was nowhere Kevariz could see, despite spending a while turning over the stuff in the lair, even picking about in the cold fireplace. In the end, Kevariz bent down to look under the bed-frame, for during the skirmish the watch could have rolled there.

Something had.

When he saw the glint of light, he took it for silver, and reached out and only snatched back his fingers in time. Under the bed, where the female must have thrust it when the Hunt approached, was a wolf-cub, not two days old. Kevariz stared in at it. It was too young yet, for much to happen with it on a Full Moon. To the unaccustomed eye, it looked only like a baby, rather thick-haired and downy, with wide, gleaming eyes. Even the dogs had overlooked it, its small scent hidden by the odor of the lair, the blood, and entrails.

"God's Silence," Kevariz stood up. He had heard of, but never before had to contend with, such an eventuality. To hutch the full-grown ones, even if he had been told to do it at other times of a month, when they appeared nearly human, would have been seen to without a qualm, once he was sure. He had witnessed this once, a female wolf in her woman shape, hanged in the market by a silver rope, her feet weighted by iron. He cheered with everyone else when the rope pulled off her head. But this—this cub—this *child*—

Kevariz stepped back, knelt down, peered again in under the bed-frame. It was crying now, the—the cub. So tiny and feeble, it made scarcely any sound, as he had sometimes found with sickly human infants when so young.

It was female.

"Devil's turd" Kevariz said to it. "Wewewolf," he said, giving it for once its full title. He hated it. He pushed his hatred in at it, like a blade.

The baby only lay crying under the bed, under the mattress and the corpse of its mother, whose heart, liver, and lights had already been removed and thrown to the hounds of Zivender and Sergan.

"God," said Kevariz.

He stood up again, again stepped backward, and trod with a crunch on the face of Ziv's silver watch, lying unseen among the general mess.

Kevariz sat drinking at the Master's table.

It was the Hunt Dinner, and Tyana would not expect him home much before the third hour of morning. None of the women were present. The Dinners at Full Moon, especially after such a successful Hunt, were often rowdy.

The men recounted what they had done, over and over—the audience, which had already seen most of it, was not bored. They told how Zivender and Sergan had gone into the cave, how Kevaz had wrenched back the first wolf's head and sliced its spine, they told the courage of the dogs, the rewarding offal. They admired the claw-scorings on Kevaz's arm, which Tyana had already attended to.

"You see, son," the Hunt Master said to Kevaz, putting an arm about his shoulders, "when I was your age, I was the same. Riding through, getting a grip. That second when the knife *bites*—God and Hell, there's nothing like it. Not even sex."

Kevaz nodded. "It's like true love," he said.

"Yes—you're right. *Love*. We *love* the brutes, don't we, we *love* them and we kill them. Can't do the one without the other."

They laughed. The fortified wines by then were passing round, purple in color, heavy and fiery, after the meats and sweets.

The wetter of blood had not put any of them off the food.

When they staggered back to their houses on the hill, most of the Huntsmen would be busy with their women.

But *Better than sex*—

"Did you ever kill a cub?" Kevaz asked, as if curious. His face was happy, flushed with wine and good-will.

"It was my luck, just the once. They look like real babies, even on Full Moon. Mostly."

"I heard of a man once," Kevaz said, "my mother told me about it at the inn—it made him ill to do that, though he was a terror with the grown ones, male or female, they could hardly hold him off from them."

"Your mother? She was trying to put you off," said the Master.

"Yes, I believe she was," Kevaz nodded.

"If ever you come across a wolf-cub and you're squeamish, son, you call a man off. I'll see you through."

"I—" said Kevaz. His voice was weak suddenly, with recollection. But the Master never noticed, as he had not suspected the lie of Kevaz's mother's tale. Instead the Master was getting to his feet, calling out another toast for the night, and the victory in one more battle.

Play-fighting, some of the Huntsmen crashed onto the table, and the remains of food, cutlery, and some wine spilled on the ground. The Master merely laughed again. He valued his men. He was a good sort.

Tyana sat up from his body, and gazed down at her by-law husband. She was surprised and disappointed.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I drank too much at dinner in the Big House."

"You drank too much—that's happened before on Hunt Nights. It makes no odds. You still want me."

"I want you. But I'm unable."

She sighed. He saw now she could be petulant, as well as stubborn. Her attractions, even her glory of hair, tonight grated on him like the stinging salves she had applied to the scratches the wolf had made as he killed it.

Soon she gave up on him. She lay down, sullen, and turned her back. "You don't love me so well as you did."

*I never loved you*, said the voice in his heart. He had only fancied her body, and needed a woman to keep his house better than a servant, and the Master anyway had said to him, playfully, "My Tyana looks at you a lot." The Master had 13 daughters by various of his women, but no sons. He must get sons, therefore, through liaisons between his Huntsmen and his daughters. Was Tyana the loveliest daughter? Was Kevaz likely to be the one the Master chose to follow in his Master's role? On other nights, when he called Kevaz "son," Kevaz had thought it might be so.

Kevaz said, "I love you like the spring, Tyana. Now close your eyes and go to sleep."

"How can I sleep without—?"

Kevaz felt himself heave out of the bed, landing on his feet on the night-frigid floor. "Be quiet!" he bellowed at her.

Then he saw her looking up at him in fright, afraid of a blow that would spoil her looks. Kevaz shook himself. He sat down leadenly in the chair by the hearth.

"Listen, Yana, tonight I had to kill—I had to kill a cub."

"A wolf-cub?"

"Yes, what else would I mean. God's Curse, it was bad for me. It looked just like a human baby. And—it cried so."

Her face was all incomprehension. Well, she had said she had no feeling for children. But the face of any one of his comrades would be the same. It had not *been* a human baby. It was a *wolf's* child. Left to live, it would grow, swiftly as any actual beast, to adulthood—and then the murder of the real children would begin, and it would rejoice as it ate their meat.

These lands were rife with wolves. Indeed, it *was* a war. And though a child in an ordinary war might be spared, *not* a child that, less than two years on, would wield the powers and blood-lust of a full-grown, supernatural enemy.

"Oh, I know," Kevaz said. "Oh, Yana, I won't hurt you. Stop cowering and lie down. Go to sleep. I'll take a walk along the hill. Clear my head. The dawn's coming and the moon's down. It's safe enough."

Did he realize, as he walked along the slope? Maybe he did. All the lights were out in the houses, save for the lamps left here and there in a porch. The windows of the Big House glistened only with the dim return of morning, and the sky was hollow. The grass was wet with dew. Kevaz walked on, toward the woods, the forest.

He knew, and had known. Of course he had known. He had come out of the lair and coined at once his beginning lie. "Ziv—look—I found it like this on the floor—you or Sergan must have trodden on it as you slaughtered that thing on the bed." And Zivender's long face, not just his beloved mare dead, but now his family keepsake smashed.

On another night, Kevaz would have told him the facts. That *he* had inadvertently trodden on the watch. He would have paid in the town for a repair, which anyway very likely would be done free for any Huntsman. But Kevaz lied, to practice.

Then, Kevaz had strolled off a way into the trees, mentioning he needed to relieve himself. No one was suspicious, why should they be?

He thought it might have smothered, bundled there inside his coat, and the silver button-claws scorching it. It was so little, not one of the others had taken it for anything more than the pack of cloth he held in there, to a nonexistent wound. Nor did it cry anymore, frozen by its contact with this otherness—Kevaz—which had dragged it from beneath the bed-frame, parceled it into the cloth kept for staunching blood, clutched it between a coat and an inimically silvered body that, to the cub, must scratch, scald, and *smell* so very wrong, a human man whose odor was not of wolf, but of wolf-killing.

The dogs still did not nose it either. Even his two, when they came bouncing at him—but to them he smelled properly of butchery, and besides, he threw them the chops that were their lot. That was what interested them.

Down in among the trees, out of sight, he had found a bush of wild eucalypt, removed the baby and rolled the cloth in the bush. Then he put the baby back into the perfumed cloth, and stowed it

in one of 50 craters in the tree trunks, well off the ground, higher than his own head would be, when he rode a horse.

He knew he was giving it, the cub, a chance. But later, after they had ridden through the woods and no one had discovered the child, or even wondered if anything was in a tree, Kevariz grasped the thorny idea that really he had only given it a slow, painful death—instead of a painful death that was fast.

Again and again that night, he cut himself on this idea, while thrusting it from his mind. For always it came back.

Now *be* was going back, back to the cratered tree, around the tumble of the river bank.

He knew what he would find, and found it. Light by then was coming through the wood like rosy smoke. In the soft rays, as he lifted the cub from the tree, a human baby lay in his hands, watching him with clear and fully focussed eyes that were like two blue moons.

Kevariz carried her down to the river, and washed her gently in the water. By this he demonstrated to himself he knew also she was far more than human. No human child so young could have stood the water's dawn cold—but she did not mind. He too was now clean of the tang of blood. He fed her the milk he had stolen from his own cupboard in the house, the home the Master gave him, that was no longer his. The wolf-child drank the milk. She was far more couth

the Master said, but men were of the world—this was not honest. Kevariz did not believe it finally. Men too were of the earth, men too were wolves, or how else, in the case of *ber* kind, could they ever be both at once?

Startling him, despite everything, the child spoke her first word to him at that moment. "Da," she said, "Da—."

"Yes, baby, I'm your da."

And in two years, he thought and knew, he would be her husband, by the oldest law there was. She was very fair, blonde and pale. Once a month, she would be one of the pure white ones.

Soon he got up, and walked them deeper into the forest, into those areas he had come across in the past, the wolf-places. For now, secure enough.

They would think, at the Big House, on the hill, he had lost his nerve and become a coward, as sometimes Huntsmen did, after which they ran away. They would search for him in the town, and in other towns—never in the woods. They understood Kevariz, the Huntsman, was too wise to hide there from jail, where the wolves might get him.

How many others, through the years, had done as he did?

It had been waiting for him, oh, yes. He who had never loved or liked, not mother or wife, not child, not even friend, not even

## MEN TOO WERE OF THE EARTH, MEN TOO WERE WOLVES.

and coordinated than the human baby she seemed to be. She could already help hold the crock. Tomorrow, he must find a cow on the edge of the town, where they went out to pasture after Full Moon. But soon she could be weaned to pasture.

Kevariz tucked the baby in his arms, sitting under the tree, as sunlight bloomed in a giant flower of flame, and altered the forest from shadowed savagery to innocence.

It was as if he had been waiting for this hour.

Kevariz felt no compunction. As he had not when he left the inn, as he had not even when he slew a wolf. He was pitiless, even in compassion, Kevariz.

The baby slept. Idly he rocked her, as he had seen women do.

For now—for a year and a half, at most, two—she would be his child, the child he had never wanted, and now did. Then she would be grown, like all her kind, into a young woman of about 17 years—Tyana's age, when he courted her. As in a pack it happened, they would thereafter be different with each other, the wolf-girl and Kevariz the Huntsman.

Except, he would never Hunt in that way again.

He would have to become one with her, live as she did, always potentially concealed, canny; if located then pursued. With Kevariz and his Huntsman's education to help her, she—and he—could perhaps survive a great while. But, if he considered sensibly, in fact they would not last long at all.

Already he had removed his silver, dropped it under the hill. The dogs, sleeping by the fire, had glanced up. He had nodded, and gone out of the door.

He recalled now the Master's words, "You'll become partly what you Hunt, as *they* are also partly like you." They were of the earth,

loyal horse and hound. And when he killed the wolves, *loving* it—it had been *fear* of love, not *love* at all, that had made him brave and mad. Protesting too much, he had blinded himself, as at the start the silver ornaments had blinded him, in the moonlight. Now, he saw. He had seen the instant he had looked at her, beneath the bed.

Like his mother, however, Kevariz had discovered he possessed the prophetic streak. His Dream was a waking one, as he walked away into the wolf-heart of the forest, beyond the lairs of men.

He saw it all before him. The way she would grow, his adopted daughter. He saw the way, at each Full Moon, she changed, coated in fur, running now upright, now on taloned hands and feet, her back raised impossibly, her face all eyes and fangs. He saw it did not count anymore, the numbers of her kind he had killed, nor the countless numbers of his kind, killed by hers. He saw that she would never, even as a beast, hurt a hair on his head. While he, to save her, would die.

He beheld them living in caves, the holes of dead trees, or running fleetly from a shouting pack of silver-clad men. He beheld them lovers, and their own first, and only, child—a boy, who, naturally, would inherit her blood, not his. His son that, as Kevariz's mother had foretold, would be a wolf. Somewhere too he watched them slain together, all three of them—but yet there was so much before that to come, so much of *life*, a living life Kevariz had never known. Surely it was worth the price.

The baby slept. This deep in the forest, even by day, the world grew darker and more profound. Since he had prophesied like his mother, and because of her foretelling of his fate, he decided he would call the child in his arms by his mother's name, Sosfiya. ♣



# CAPTAIN FANTASY AND THE SECRET MASTERS

IN A WORLD FULL OF EVIL GENIUSES,

WE ALL NEED SOMEONE TO

BELIEVE IN, SOMETHING

TO HANG ON TO, EVEN

IF IT'S NOT

ENTIRELY

REAL.

**S**hortly before I met Captain Fantasy, I sliced the end of my forefinger off while dicing cucumber for a salad. I shouted and shook my hand, splashing blood on the counter and tearing the thin strip of skin that held my fingertip on. The tiny lump of flesh tore loose and flew into the sink, down the garbage disposal, gone.

I cursed, then concentrated on my nerve endings, switching off the pain. My whole finger went numb. I had trouble controlling the nerves on such a small scale. Holding my finger in the air like a "we're-number-one" fan at a basketball game, I urged new flesh to grow over the wound. I'd make a few big hamburgers to go with my salad, supply some mass and calories for the healing ... my new fingertip should be grown by morning, though the nail would take

longer, and I'd have to either keep the nerves dead or be careful not to scrape the sensitive under-nail skin.

The phone rang. I answered it left-handed, clumsily. I expected my director, Jack Harrah, to call and remind me of that night's dress rehearsal, as if I'd forget. I was playing Orestes, the lead, at Harrah's Greek Revival theater. "Hello?"

"Hi, Li," Brady Doolittle said.

I almost hung up. But why bother? They'd found me. "Boss," I said, neutrally. "I tendered my resignation."

"Not accepted," Brady said cheerfully. "We need the best Metamorph available, and that's you. We let you run loose for nearly a year, never bothered you. Be grateful for that."

So they'd kept tabs on me all along. Well, of course. The Facility didn't lose track of people. "Tomorrow's opening night. Can't it wait until—"



"Your understudy, Bill Monroe, he can handle it. By tomorrow night, you'll be playing a much more important part."

Brady knew everything. Always. That's why he ran the Facility. I looked at the spots of blood on the counter and gave in. "When can I expect you?"

"A car's waiting outside. Pack a bag." He paused. "I think you'll like this one, Li."

"Sure." I hung up. I didn't have to pack a bag; I already had one ready, a change of clothes, travel-sized toiletries. Old habits die hard.

Walking to the car, an anonymous government sedan, I thought, *I'm like Orestes, trapped by cruel fate*. I had to smile at that. Such melodrama. Even if I had to play the part of secret agent again, I didn't have to ham it up.

**SEVERAL HOURS AND A PLANE TRIP LATER, I FOUND MYSELF BACK IN** the Facility. *You never get away*, I thought.

"What did you do to your finger?" Brady asked, bushy eyebrows raised over his boyish face. He motioned me into the elevator. "Nice face, by the way. Very Greek."

I grunted and stared at the elevator doors, listening to the Facility hum around me as we descended. Brady didn't speak again, didn't try to draw me out, and I finally asked the question that had been plaguing me. "Is this about Kelli? Has she done something else?"

"Yep. Makes the rainy day affair look like teatime, too."

I had a hard time believing that. Kelli, with the help of the mad Dr. Nefarious, had wreaked havoc with the world's weather the year before, until I stopped them. We'd captured Dr. Nefarious, but Kelli, the mastermind, had escaped. What could he worse than endless rain drowning the world?

The doors opened and Brady led me down a long, white corridor. "Is that why you said I'd like this?" I asked. "Because Kelli is involved? You think I want another chance at her?"

Brady shook his head. "No. I know you aren't the vengeful type. There's another reason you'll like it." Brady stopped at a reinforced door. He touched a palm reader, pressed his eyes to a retinal scanner, spoke his name loudly, and punched a long string of numbers

who could enforce their delusions on the world, if they got free. "Is Kelli here?" I asked as the door slid shut.

"No, but we've got a room all picked out for her. She's been here recently, though. She broke someone out." Brady smiled at my shocked expression. "That's top secret, you understand." He pressed a finger to his lips.

"That's impossible!"

"Yeah, we thought so, too, until she did it. She had inside help, of course, and it couldn't happen again, but once was enough." He led me around a corner, to a black golf cart. Brady got behind the wheel and I sat beside him. The cameras turned and followed our progress like the heads of watchful jackals. We drove past blank metal doors set at regular intervals.

"How many inmates are there?" I asked. I'd served with the Facility as a field agent for years, but I'd never seen the Black Wing. Metamorphs are masters of disguise, born impostors, and our usual assignments don't require access to the holding cells for super-powered criminals.

"Way too many and not nearly enough," Brady said. We turned a corner, and I finally saw something that broke the monotonous black. One of the cell doors, bent and twisted, leaned against the wall across from a gaping doorway.

I whistled. "How did that happen? I don't see any marks from explosives."

Brady stopped the cart. "Carl Spandau, one of our guards, a Strongman with a titanium-alloy skeleton. We spent a lot of money giving him a set of bones that could support the strain his power put on his body. Then he betrayed us. We found him with his arms broken from tearing off the door, crying, but not from the pain. He'd disabled the teleport-dampeners, the quantum-entanglement disrupters, all the failsafes. Stuff he shouldn't have known about, codes he'd spent months ferreting out. Kelli bounced in, snatched up our prisoner, and teleported away—without Spandau. That's why he was crying. He said he loved her, and refused to believe she'd just been using him."

I nodded solemnly. Kelli could make you believe anything. I didn't ask what happened to Spandau. I know how the Facility deals with traitors.

"Who'd she break out?" I asked, not irritated at Brady's vagueness, simply needing to know so I could do my job. Seeing the Black Wing breached, hearing about poor stupid traitorous Carl Spandau's arms, had changed my resentful resignation to acceptance. I'd do what I had to.

"Josef Mengele got away," Brady said.

I stared at him, as incomprehending as if he'd said Rasputin had escaped, or Vlad Tepes. "Mengele? The Angel of Death, the mad doctor of Auschwitz? But he's dead, they found his skeleton in '85, it was all over the papers!"

"People believe any damn thing," Brady said quietly. "We've had him for years. He's almost 90 now, frail but physically healthy, considering."

"Why?" I demanded. "He should have been tried at Nuremberg! He was the worst of the war criminals, so cold, and the experiments—" I broke off, staring at Brady.

Brady looked away. "Yes. The experiments. Mengele studied the limits of special powers, did things no ethical scientist could, but the knowledge..." He shrugged. "We needed it."

I nodded, disgusted. The Facility depended on people like me and Spandau, Metamorphs and Strongmen, as well as Mind-readers, Pyrokinetics, Teleporters, Invisibles, all the extraordinary ones, and Mengele had studied our kind, dissected us, tested us to destruction. The Nazis, fascinated with the concept of supermen, had a special interest in such individuals. Just like the Facility did. "You want me to bring Mengele back."

"In a nutshell."

"But why me? What, I disguise myself as the Führer, say 'I didn't die in that bunker, Josef, come with me? Why do you need a Metamorph?'"

**"HE DOESN'T THINK HE'S ANY OLDER, SO HE ISN'T. THAT'S WHY HE'S INVINCIBLE."**

into the keypad. I watched with interest and apprehension. Extreme security measures, even for the Facility, which meant—

The door slid open, revealing another corridor. Floor, walls, and ceiling were all the color of used motor oil, and cameras bristled every couple of feet. "Welcome to the Black Wing, Li."

I didn't step inside. "I heard you've got Bludgeon Man locked up in here. And Junior Atwater's brain, in a jar."

"Yeah, I've heard those, too," Brady said. "People believe any damn thing, don't they? Now come on. If this door stays open too long, alarms go crazy, and we'll be neck-deep in very tense guards."

I stepped over the threshold. The Black Wing was like the inside of a tumor. No wonder mental institutions favor soothing colors to pacify the patients. These walls had the opposite effect; they could drive a sane person mad. The Black Wing surely held a few mental patients, the ones with extraordinary powers. The ones

"We need you to impersonate someone, of course." Then, sounding doubtful for the first time: "That's the part you'll like." Brady drove past the torn door. "I want you to meet somebody."

"Who else do you have in here? Stalin? Genghis Khan? Colonel Kurtz?"

"You don't want to know," Brady said.

## **EVEN WITHOUT THE FAMILIAR COSTUME, I RECOGNIZED HIM IMMEDIATELY.**

Hearing about Mengele had stunned me. Seeing this man, here, left me literally incapable of speech.

The Captain looked just as he had in the old pictures and newsreel footage from World War II. He should have been at least 75, but he looked no older than 30. *He doesn't age*, I thought, chilled and awed at the same time. No one had ever known the full extent of Captain Fantasy's reality-altering powers. In the war, he and his sidekick Spaceboy had routed the Germans time and again, though Baron Von Blitz managed to kill Spaceboy near the end of the war, and they said the Captain was never the same after that.

Captain Fantasy sat behind a white table. He was a massive red-haired man dressed in green clothes that resembled intern's scrubs. A red and blue plastic top spun before him on the table. He stared at the toy intently, his teeth clenched in concentration.

"Oh Captain, my Captain," Brady said.

The Captain looked up, and I glimpsed his hewidered expression, quickly replaced by a broad smile. "Why, you must be a doctor." The top fell over.

I looked at Brady, unease crawling like a worm in my stomach. In his jeans and black T-shirt, Brady looked nothing like a doctor.

The Captain lowered his voice. "Was it a mortar, doc? From Baron Von Blitz's artillery?" He tapped the side of his head. "I heard Spaceboy yell, and then, poof! Everything black. I must have taken one right to the head, huh?"

Brady didn't say anything, just stood with his arms crossed. I looked at Captain Fantasy, my childhood hero, and my throat closed up. Spaceboy had been dead for 40 years. I remembered watching Captain Fantasy deliver the eulogy on television. That was before my time, of course, but even in the '60s, when I grew up, Captain Fantasy was a celebrity, with films and books, cartoons and lunchboxes, all chronicling his wartime glories.

When Brady didn't answer, the Captain's grin faltered, and that disturbing look of naked confusion returned.

Brady turned on his heel and left the room. With a last look at the Captain, I hurried after him.

"Is it amnesia?" I asked when Brady closed the door. But that didn't seem right. The Captain remembered Spaceboy and Baron Von Blitz, and I didn't doubt that he remembered Goebbels and the Hitlerbot and Mengele's homunculi ... just nothing after the battle when Spaceboy died. I narrowed my eyes. "Or did the Facility do this to him?"

"No, it wasn't us," Brady said. "Demonstrations work better than explanations. Come on." He went back into the Captain's room.

Feeling like an extra in a Chaplin film, or a Keystone Kop running in circles, I followed him.

The Captain still sat, his top spinning. He looked up, smiling. "Hey there! You must be a doctor!"

I gasped. The scene was so strange, too eerily similar to the first time we'd come in. Like someone had hit a great "Reset" button and started the whole encounter over.

The Captain looked at me. "Is Spaceboy all right? The Baron really got the drop on us, huh?" He ran a huge hand through his hair.

"Have you ever seen us before?" Brady asked.

The Captain laughed, a scattered sound. "Oh, I meet lots of people, you know, I've never been good with faces."

"Have you seen anyone else in the last few minutes?"

The Captain shook his head. "No, sir. I've been sitting right here

since I woke up."

"Just take it easy, Captain. We'll bring you some food and fill you in on things."

"But Spaceboy, is he all right?"

"Oh, yes. He's fine."

I stared at Brady. Was he being cruel, or kind? And what had happened to Captain Fantasy?

Brady motioned me back into the black hallway. "Karsakov's syndrome," he said. "A rare neurological disorder. It's a nasty form of amnesia. Basically destroys the brain's ability to hold short-term memories. Long-term memory is unaffected, so he knows who he is and remembers his life, but he can't hold on to new memories for more than a few minutes. He lives in a perpetual present. He's met me dozens of times, but he can't remember. He doesn't even know anything's wrong, or if he does suspect that something's amiss, he doesn't know *what*."

I nodded, trying to process the information. It was like being a child and learning my parents were mortal, that they could make mistakes—a blow to my whole world view. I'd always thought of Captain Fantasy as, well, *invincible*. "Why doesn't he remember anything after that last battle?"

Brady shrugged. "Sometimes Karsakov's is retrograde, and destroys a portion of the long-term memory, too. The Captain's memories stop in 1945."

"What causes it?"

"I'm no doctor ... bad brains, I guess. I understand that if you're predisposed anyway, heavy drinking can lead to the onset of Karsakov's. You probably didn't know, they kept it out of the media, but the Captain went down hill after the war, and drinking was only part of it. He wanted to come out of retirement and help with the China problem back in '55, but then all that mess with Bludgeon Man and the Atwater Coup happened ... then, in '75, we got word that Captain Fantasy had shown up at a pub in New York, dressed in full costume, demanding to know where Spaceboy was. The Facility picked him up, and he's been here ever since."

I sat on the golf cart. "This is a lot to absorb. He even looks the same."

"He doesn't think he's any older, so he isn't. We think that's why he's invincible, too. Most kids think they're invulnerable, they take stupid risks and get hurt. But the Captain *never* got hurt, because while he believed himself invincible, he was. He grew up that way, and never had a reason to believe differently. I guess he just never worried about his mental health ... or, hell, maybe his power has a negative effect on his brain chemistry. Who knows?"

"This is sad," I said at last. "But what does it have to do with Kelli, and the rest of it? The Captain could help us with Mengele, I guess, if he were healthy ..."

"This is the part you'll really like," Brady said. "You're going to impersonate Spaceboy, and, with the Captain's help, apprehend Kelli and Mengele."

I put my head in my hands. "You'd better explain how that's going to work."

"All in good time. First, let's get you to wardrobe."

**SILVER TIGHTS. SILVER BOOTS. EVEN THE LACES. A SILVER SHIRT WITH** long sleeves, accordeoned at the elbows. Silver gloves, fortunately, to cover my damaged forefinger. A silver domino mask. Spaceboy's famous skintight costume, tailored perfectly to fit me.

I looked in the mirror and watched my facial muscles bunch, move, and tighten. Occidental eyes. A rounder chin. Snub nose. That rosebud, almost girlish, mouth. I leached the pigment from my face, changing the Greek cast I'd affected for my part as Orestes. I compared my face in the mirror to a small photograph and nodded, satisfied. "I've got the face right, and the hair's OK.

but I'm three or four inches too tall. There's nothing I can do about that."

"Close enough for jazz," Brady said. "The Captain is desperate to see something familiar, to find his bearings. We could wrap you in aluminum foil and he'd believe you were Spaceboy."

I plucked at the seat of the silver costume. "Foil wouldn't be so tight." "If the Captain had a girl sidekick, she couldn't have gotten away with wearing something like that," Brady agreed. "Your costume's better than Spaceboy's original. Bulletproof, shock absorbent, and made of smartcloth, with its own musculature." Brady grinned. He looked like a wolf at a lamb-shearing. "To help you do the somersaults and shit."

I groaned. I'd kept in shape, but Spaceboy's famed speed and acrobatics were beyond me. Spaceboy had trained as a teenage gymnast, and during his three years with Captain Fantasy he'd pushed his flexibility to the limit. "So we tell the Captain that Mengele's hiding out, and we have to bring him to justice. Then we ride out in the Fantasy-copter and apprehend the villainous et cetera."

"You should write briefings," Brady said. "You're so good at abstracting the essentials from a plan." He led me out of wardrobe to the elevator.

"But he forgets everything after five minutes," I protested. "How is he supposed to remember the mission?"

Brady turned a key in the elevator and punched the buttons that would take us to the Black Wing. "In some cases of Korsakow's, surrounding the victim with familiar things provides a sense of continuity. In one case, a patient was driven to his old neighborhood. He perked right up, wanted to know how they'd put up a supermarket overnight, but otherwise he thought things were fine. They took him to his old house, and he sat in his favorite chair, tapped his barometer, read a book. He wondered why his wife had changed the drapes, but he didn't notice that his wife had aged five years." Brady looked at me pointedly.

"Close enough for jazz," I murmured. "So seeing me, and riding in a replica of the Fantasy-copter, you think that'll keep him in the present?"

"He'll still believe it's 1945, but that's OK. He's willing to fool himself a lot."

The elevator stopped. As we stepped into the hallway, I asked "What happened to that guy you were telling me about when he had to leave his house?"

"They took him back to the hospital. He cried and screamed, asked his wife why she'd brought him to such a place, why she was leaving him."

"God," I said, chilled by the image. "Pretty awful. But 10 minutes later he'd forgotten all about it." We entered the Black Wing and returned to the golf cart.

"Where do we begin?" I asked, sitting down.

Brady handed me an envelope. I wasn't surprised to find it addressed to me. The Facility had intercepted my mail. I opened it and removed the little card inside, decorated with balloons and party hats. "Come to My Party!" it read, in festive blue and red letters. Inside, it read "Join the Secret Masters in celebration of Kelli's birthday!" Under "Time" it read "As Convenient." Under "Place" it gave a set of coordinates.

"In the Atlantic Ocean," Brady said.

"Is she on a boat?"

"Not that our satellites can see. But we figure it's not a wild goose chase."

"Kelli likes to play games, but not that kind," I said. "What's this 'Secret Masters' stuff?"

"Well ... It's just speculation, but a lot of high-powered fugitives and crazies have been inactive, dropping out of sight lately. Thunderhead, Brainchild, The Teacher, Broadside, Svengali Briggs ... no activity for months. We think Kelli's gathering the bad guys together. The old Legion of Supervillains gag, you know?"

I nodded. "Seems like her style. Into the viper pit, huh?"

"At least you'll have the greatest hero in history at your side."

"I'd rather have a crack Facility squad."

"They'll be nearby. If things get out of hand, they'll try to contain the situation."

"Why take the Captain at all? I mean, if he had full possession of his faculties—"

Brady handed me another envelope. "Because she invited him, too. And Kelli's promised to do some nasty things if he doesn't show up. As a demonstration, she bombed Easter Island. Wiped it out, and we didn't even see how she deployed the weapon, though fortunately it seems to be a clean bomb. Some toy Dr. Nefarious made for her, probably, during the rainy day affair. She said Christmas Island would go next, then a little town called Thanksgiving, Pennsylvania." He tapped the Captain's invitation. "In keeping with her holiday theme."

"That's crazy," I said. "What does she want with Captain Fantasy?"

"What does she want with Mengele? He's almost totally senile. Why does she do anything? Crazy's right."

## WHEN THE CAPTAIN SAW ME IN COSTUME, DISGUISED AS SPACEBOY.

He rushed across the room and embraced me, lifting me off my feet. I expected to be crushed into hone jelly, but the Captain squeezed gently. "I thought you were done for," he whispered, reddish stubble rubbing my cheek.

I am, I thought, feeling lower than dogshit. *Blown to meat and splinters and scraps of cloth, 45 years ago.*

The Captain let go. "Not me, Captain," I said, pitching my voice higher than normal. My facility with vocal impressions has always been an asset on my assignments. I surprised myself by saying "Leaping lizards, Captain, they couldn't get me."

Leaping lizards. A classic Spaceboy exclamation, and it had simply popped out. Had I assumed the role so completely? Or did Captain Fantasy's ability to warp reality extend beyond his personal space, was he in some fashion transforming me into Spaceboy?

The idea bothered me, and I began to sweat. I shut off my glands so the Captain wouldn't notice. "Captain," I said gravely, wanting to get it over with. "We have a problem."

## MENGELE! CAPTAIN FANTASY SAID, WALKING QUICKLY UP THE STAIRS.

Red cape flapping, black boots thudding on the risers. "I've been waiting for a chance at him. Is the helicopter prepared, Spaceboy?"

"Right on the roof, Captain," I said, hurrying after him. "And I've got the coordinates."

"God bless American military intelligence," the Captain said reverently, and then burst through the door, onto the roof.

A pale blue sky stretched above us, touching the low, scrub-covered mountains. The air smelled of desert sage. The Fantasy-copter, a low-slung two-seater in red and cobalt blue, crouched like a lethal dragonfly a dozen yards away. Captain Fantasy strode across the roof and opened the cockpit. I hurried around the other side to join him, ducking as the long rotors began to turn, lazily at first, then with invisible speed.

I belted in, light-headed. Captain Fantasy gave me a thumbs-up and took the controls. I grinned, feeling strangely exuberant. *I shouldn't be so excited, I thought—this is serious.* But I was in a helicopter with Captain Fantasy, about to fight the forces of villainy at his side ... it was a childhood dream come true.

The helicopter lifted off, and we zoomed toward the ocean.

## IT'S NEARBY." I SAID, SHOUTING TO BE HEARD OVER THE HELICOPTER'S

machinery. We skimmed close to the water, not moving very

quickly. I looked at the placid expanse of blue-green water, seeking something out of the ordinary, some indication of Kelli's presence. "I don't—"

Something boiled up from the ocean, but before I could make it out, we'd flown past. Then the helicopter jerked, throwing me hard against my straps. I squawked and choked, unable to take a breath, and water rushed up at the cockpit's windshield.

We smashed into the ocean. I dangled in my seat, facing the water-occluded windshield, amazed that the impact hadn't hurt me more. The smartcloth in my costume had spread the impact evenly across my body.

Behind us, metal sheared as the rear of the helicopter parted from the front. I smelled smoke.

The Captain unhooked his harness and dropped to the windshield, which had taken the place of the floor. I followed suit. With the back half of the 'copter ripped off, the sky showing clear and blue above us, the cockpit was transformed into a shallow cup floating on the ocean. The Captain reached under his seat and slung scuba gear toward me. I scrambled into the tank and mouthpiece. I'd just pulled on my flippers when something ripped the cockpit apart.

I saw tentacles the size of firehoses, and then the sea rushed in, howling me over and dunking me. I forced myself to remain calm despite my heart's thundering and the shock of cold water. My silver suit began heating immediately. Captain Fantasy was treading water several feet away and I swam toward him, kicking hard against the undertow created by the sinking 'copter. I didn't see tentacles, but that didn't reassure me. If some monster inhabited the water with us, I wanted to be close to the Captain.

I looked up, expecting Facility agents to sweep in for the rescue. The sky remained clear. Were they so confident that we could handle this, or had Brady lied about our backup?

The Captain wrapped one gauntleted arm around my waist and held me up easily, my rear pressed against his pelvis. I blushed when I realized what I felt pressing against me through the Captain's wet tights. Evidently, danger excited him.

I forgot about the Captain's arousal when tentacles broke the surface again, a dozen waving in the air as if attempting some strange semaphore. Several of the tentacles were torn, gushing blood, probably ripped off when they grabbed the Fantasy-copter and brought us down.

The tentacles were bad, but then I saw the rest.

A blunt shark's head broke the surface, four feet across, with 10-inch-long teeth marching back row-by-row in its gaping mouth. Crude black stitching crossed its head. One saucer-sized eye stared at us, black, and a cobwebby cataract gummed the other. A small metal lens glinted between its natural eyes.

I wet myself, and if the Captain hadn't held me, I would have swum away as fast as possible. I hadn't signed up to face monsters—at least, not inhuman ones—and my thrill at fighting by the Captain's side didn't include facing something like this.

The Captain tossed me aside with a bellow. I hit the water, sank, and emerged in time to see the Captain leap from the water and drive his arm up to the elbow in the shark's good eye. He crouched on its snout, heedless of its snapping jaws, and pulled out a handful of red and gray matter. The tentacles lashed spastically, and I occupied myself with avoiding them. After a few seconds they stopped moving, and I looked back at the Captain.

His arms were bloody to the shoulders. He waved jauntily at the dead shark-thing's camera-eye, then ripped out the metal and tossed it into the water. He jumped off and sidestroke casually toward me. The shark rolled over and floated, belly to the sky, tentacles trailing beside it like catfish whiskers.

"Looks like one of Dr. Morlock's creatures," the Captain said.

I blinked at him, looked at the shark, and said, "Jumping jackals, Captain, you're right." Dr. Morlock had worked with Mengele, but

his experiments involved "enhancing" natural predators. One of his creations had killed him in '46 or '47, if I recalled, so he couldn't be responsible for this monster. But if he hadn't made this shark, why the crude stitching, Dr. Morlock's signature?

I looked at the Captain. My bowels clenched. The Captain believed it was 1945. Had the force of his belief acted to alter local time? Could he be so powerful? Had he plunged us into a long-past sea battle with Dr. Morlock?

It's impossible, I thought, but knew with Captain Fantasy anything could happen.

The Captain tenderly pulled my face mask down over my eyes. He touched my cheek and smiled. "Come on. I think Mengele and Morlock are below us." Then, without so much as taking a deep breath, he dove beneath the waves.

I've always wanted to see a U-boat, I thought miserably, and followed.

## **IF I HADN'T ALREADY EMPTIED MY BLADDER, I WOULD HAVE WET MYSELF AGAIN.**

Not a submarine, as I'd expected. A submerged city.

Specifically, the squat metal starfish of the Nazi Unterseeberg, the Reich's main submarine base, the bunker to which Goebbels fled during the German collapse. The Captain swam toward the dimly phosphorescent building and I frog-kicked after him, letting the smartsuit do most of the work. Faced with this impossible artifact from the past, my mind reeled. I stared at the dark metal sprawl, thinking "No, no, no."

The Unterseeberg clung to an artificial reef, only a few hundred yards below the surface. The Allies had torpedoed that stronghold, and Goebbels with it, at the end of the war. There should have been ruins, twisted metal beams grown thick with barnacles, but not a complete city. Its presence confirmed my fears. Captain Fantasy's delusion had become reality, and we'd gone back in time.

Would I become Spaceboy next?

Before I could give in to despair, or simply freeze in light of the situation's enormity, frogmen streamed from an airlock, and I had to fight. I dodged speargun bolts, astonished and terrified by my own agility, seeing it as another indication that I was becoming Spaceboy. The smartcloth alone couldn't account for my new lightning reflexes and dexterity, astonishing even under water.

The Captain moved more ponderously, but dealt with the divers efficiently, tearing aside their antiquated (to my eyes) gear, slamming their heads together, kicking them in the stomach. When the last frogman fled toward the surface, I joined the Captain at the divers' airlock. The Captain punched through the reinforced steel and peeled it back, gesturing for me to go through the hole. I slithered in, and the Captain widened the hole and followed.

Once inside, he tugged the ragged edges back into place and rubbed his hand rapidly in circles across the torn metal. After a few seconds a red glow appeared beneath his hand, and the water around the door began to boil. The steel under Captain Fantasy's hand turned molten in the cracks, and the Captain stopped rubbing. He'd created enough friction to melt steel and make the airlock watertight again. He hit the decompression button and the water level in the lock sank.

I felt triumphant, just being with the Captain, forgetting for a moment the temporal situation. It occurred to me an instant later that the exultation I felt might be Spaceboy's, and wondered how the change might happen, a transformation of my personality into that of the Captain's dead sidekick. Would I feel it happen, the last of my self dissolving, finally becoming my role as I'd never managed in the past?

The Captain kicked right through the interior door, tearing a wide opening. I followed him into a well-lit, narrow corridor

that curved away after a few yards. Clunky surveillance cameras observed us. The Captain whooped and smashed the cameras, hopping to reach them.

I grinned around my mouthpiece. The Captain had so much *fun* fighting the forces of evil—that joyfulness accounted for most of his popularity.

When he'd killed all the cameras in that deserted length of corridor, the Captain took me in his arms and kissed me full on the lips.

Stunned, I didn't react at all, even to resist. The Captain's stubble dug into my chin, and his huge arms held me tight. He put me down, gently, and said, "Let's go get Mengele." Then he ran, boots pounding.

## I BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND THE WHATS, THOUGH THE WHYS STILL ESCAPED ME.

I followed, things coming clear in my mind. That first embrace, the Captain's extremity of grief when the real Spaceboy died, the way he'd raged and destroyed Baron Von Blitz and his artillery on that sad day, the Captain's bachelorhood, maybe even Spaceboy's skintight silver costume, all those things made sense, now. In the '40s, homosexual heroes wouldn't have been tolerated, and even now no one would accept a 17-year-old boy lover. I doubted Brady knew about this, or that anyone else did.

I probed myself for signs of arousal. If I felt attracted to the Captain, would that indicate a step in my transformation? I couldn't discern any reaction other than shock.

Somewhat reassured, but much more conscious of my skintight suit, I followed him.

**S**EVERAL CORRIDORS LATER THE CAPTAIN BATTERED HIS WAY THROUGH another door, and shouted in triumph from the other side. I hurried after him, and at the far end of a low oblong room, I saw Dr. Morlock and the Storm Troupe waiting for us.

That proved it. We'd gone back in time.

We faced the German Übermenschen, the high-profile PR warriors, the Reich's answer to the Allies' Captain Fantasy and Fat Man and Corporal Justice. Baron Von Blitz stepped toward us, sneering in his blue uniform, silver lightning bolts on his sleeves, huge black goggles covering half his face. His lieutenants flanked him, Krieger and Alder, massive twins, one a Strongman, the other a Flier. They wore contrasting red and white costumes. The rear guard, Brickhouse, didn't move. He'd once been an American citizen, but had become a Nazi sympathizer and defector. His invulnerable skin gleamed like red metal under the harsh lights. Off to one side, the diminutive Dr. Morlock in his white lab coat rubbed his hands together and giggled.

I stopped a few paces behind the Captain, and for a long moment we faced the Troupe. *This is it*, I thought, a tight ball of fear in my belly. The sort of thing I'd dreamed of as a stupid kid—fighting genuine villains beside a true hero.

The Captain, that unparalleled man of action, broke the pause. He charged them.

I noticed the long slots in the floor then, laid at right angles, a crazy gridwork that made no sense but alarmed me anyway. I shouted a warning, and in mid-cry metal walls rose from the

slots with the sound of smooth hydraulics. I jumped aside to avoid being cut apart, seeing the light gleam from the razor-sharp edge on top of the wall in front of me. I stared at my reflection in the mirrored wall and understood. The slots in the floor, the bizarre gridlines; this was a maze, separating me from the Captain. I tried to remember the layout of the slots, but I'd only seen them for a moment, and couldn't recall anything useful. Would the Captain maintain continuity without my presence, faced only with his reflection, or would he wander lost in the maze? Did he even need me for continuity anymore, since his delusion had become reality?

A great crash and the shriek of stressed metal interrupted Dr. Morlock's continuing titter. I grinned, unable to help myself. The maze hadn't daunted the Captain at all. He simply smashed his way through, not altering his course a bit. I wanted to join him. With my smartsuit (and a hint of Spaceboy's agility) I could clamber over the walls ... and be sliced in two by the razor-sharp edges. But wasn't there a trick to mazes, taking only right turns, or something? If I could reach the place where the Captain started busting through walls, I could follow his route. The crashing sound of his progress went on.

I hurried down the corridor and turned right into a cul-de-sac. But not an empty one.

Baron Von Blitz leered at me. My heart hammered. He'd killed the original Spaceboy, and now he'd kill me. I had to run, to escape—and then he reached out, holding a stunstick, and struck me over the heart. My muscles contracted, and I fell to the floor, hacking out. My last thoughts weren't panicked, or angry, or regretful. Instead, my mind made a cool observation.

*They didn't have stunsticks during World War II. They hadn't been invented yet.*

**I** WOKE UP SLOWLY, LIKE A MAN SWIMMING OUT OF A BLACK POOL INTO THE light. I jerked against the cords holding me to a straight-backed chair, startled by the closeness of Dr. Morlock's pale face, his watery eyes staring at me.

Up close I could see through his disguise. Not Dr. Morlock at all. I couldn't remember his real name, but he called himself Brainchild, and he occupied a respectably high position on the Facility's Most Wanted List. In my time, he'd shaved his head and put on horn-rimmed glasses, heightening a natural resemblance to the infamous doctor, but the disguise didn't hold up under scrutiny. Still, close enough.

Close enough for jazz.

I began to understand the whats, though the whys still escaped me.

"He's awake, Kelli," Brainchild said, his breath puffing the smell of butter and cheese into my face. He pinched my cheek, hard. "You look just like Spaceboy. Good job, scout."

I barely heard him, straining against my ropes to look for Kelli. Author of my despair, the pretty stiletto, the birthday girl playing some bizarre party game of her own devising. Playing with the world, but playing more immediately with me.

Brainchild scuttled away and Kelli stepped into my field of vision. Beautiful, made up like a '40s movie star in a sea-green silk party gown. She looked like Veronica Lake, full blonde hair falling to her shoulders, a just-so beauty mark over the corner of her mouth. She laced her hands together and smiled at me maternally. "David," she said, then wrinkled her nose. "I finally found out your first name. It's too boring! Let's stick with Li. So macho, so ... monosyllabic. You probably wonder why I brought you here—and in such a complicated fashion."

"You wanted the Captain," I said, trying to sound bored. "You knew about his condition, you knew how to create continuity by surrounding him with familiar people and things. You built this replica of the Unterseeberg, you got your cronies to dress up like famous period Nazis ..." I inclined my head, as much as possible



against the ropes, toward Brainchild. "I figure Thunderhead is the one posing as Von Blitz ... I'm not sure about the others. And it worked. Where's the Captain now?"

"In a white room, of course. Living in the now." She seemed amused. "Anything you don't understand, oh wise Mr. Li?"

Lots of things, but I asked the question most pertinent to my mission. "Why did you free Mengele?"

"To execute him. We ejected his body—what remained of it—into the water this morning." She lifted one elegant eyebrow at my surprise. "Shocked? He was hopelessly senile, worthless to us anyway. Mengele's execution came as a condition of Brainchild's cooperation. Without him, we couldn't have built this base, or engineered that monstrous shark we used as a prop ... Brainchild wanted Mengele dead, and I could deliver, so we made an arrangement."

I remembered Brainchild's real name, then. Itzak Goldberg. I didn't know anything about his relatives, or where they'd been during WWII, but I could make certain guesses, and even sympathize, a little.

"I got an hour alone with him," Brainchild said, looking down at his pudgy hands, making fists and then relaxing them. I shivered. Monster or not, war criminal or not, I didn't want to think of senile Mengele in Brainchild's vengeful hands.

"I thought it made a nice bit of misdirection, too," Kelli said. "Let them think I had some plans for Mengele. His relationship to Captain Fantasy, however tangential, served to make the distraction plausible, don't you think?"

I granted.

Kelli leaned forward, put her hands on my shoulders, and looked into my face. I could read nothing in her green eyes. "There are things Brady didn't tell you, Li. Imagine! Your own superior, lying to you! Did he tell you about the Tourette's? About the neurological disorders?"

I didn't answer. Name, rank, serial number, I thought. That's the way the Captain would play it. I'd said too much already.

"I know he didn't. Captain Fantasy has Karsakov's syndrome, you know that. And he warps reality, you know that too. You had no reason to think of those facts in combination. It's a well-kept government secret. Prolonged exposure to Captain Fantasy results in neurological damage, Li. It's like a radiation he gives off." She smiled. "Spaceboy, the original, had Tourette's. You know about that condition? A brain disorder. Symptoms include vocal and physical tics. 'Leaping lizards, Captain!'" She mimicked Spaceboy with vicious accuracy. "Tourettes often have amazing reflexes, too. They're attracted to shiny things, and things that move quickly. Some of them make a game of darting in and out of revolving doors, they're that fast. Ah, the light dawns. Been feeling frisky and fidgety, have you, Li? Yes, you've got Tourette's, too, though not as severely as Spaceboy did."

I blew air hard through my teeth. It all made sense, and it made me furious. Brady had known, he'd exposed me to brain damage, and he hadn't told me. For the greater good, right. That's the Facility's excuse for everything, and the worst thing is, it so often holds up.

"It could be worse. You could have developed aphasia, or lost your kinesthetic sense, or even gotten Karsakov's yourself. Do you see, Li, how your masters would have wasted you? She took her hands off my shoulders, touched my face. "Join me. Let's wreck the governments, teach them all a hard lesson. They deserve it, and I wouldn't waste you."

I smiled a little. "Fuck the world, right, Kelli?"

She smiled back, indulgent, pleased. "Yes, Li. Fuck the world."

"I can't do it."

Her smile disappeared. "You remain loyal to the Facility, after all this? Then you're a fool."

I shook my head as much as the bindings would allow. "I don't care about the Facility, you're right, they're bastards. But you want

to use Captain Fantasy, somehow, and I can't go along with that. Because he's a real hero, even if he is sick, even if he makes other people sick. He'd die to save the world, Kelli ... I won't help you use him to hurt it."

"Then we'll have to use you," she said, sounding regretful. "Because you're right. He would die to save the world ... but he'd kill to save Spaceboy. I'd hoped you would cooperate, but we can do what's necessary anyway. Dear Li. My worthy opponent." She kissed her fingers and touched my cheek, then walked away, swaying beautifully in her gown, sinuous as a cobra.

## **B**RAINCHILD DRUGGED ME, AND AFTER A WHILE I WOKE IN THE CENTRAL

hub of the Unterseeburg, suspended 20 feet above the floor. The transparent dome overhead revealed the vast dark water, and creatures moving in it, Brainchild's creations. I looked upward groggily for a long time before noting my surroundings. I moved my arms and legs experimentally, found myself unbound. They'd put me inside a transparent glass box, coffin-sized but upright, hanging from the ceiling. I lowered my head, taking in the narrow platform under my feet and the people below.

I saw Captain Fantasy first. He looked up at me, veins standing out in his neck, huge fists clenched. The impostors stood a respectful distance away, Morlock and Blitz, with Kelli clinging to the Baron's arm like an airhead showpiece.

My head began to clear. I heard a click, and then the crackle of a hissing speaker. How nice of them to let me listen to the conversation. The Baron spoke, loud, haughty, with a terrible German accent. "Do you agree to our terms, Captain? Will you do as we say, strike where we tell you? If you do not ..." I could imagine his sneer, the only bit of mimicry Thunderhead did well. "Your little sidekick dies." He gestured imperiously, and Brainchild pulled a lever, giggling like Dr. Morlock.

I heard the sound and understood before I looked down.

Plates in the floor slid aside, revealing a dark pit full of spinning silver blades. I couldn't see the area directly below my feet, but I imagined more of the same, enough circular saws to make me into luncheon meat. *Such drama*, I thought, knees weak, suddenly very aware of the flimsy metal platform under my feet. I twisted enough to look down and see the hinges, built to let the platform swing open and drop me. Probably another lever to control that. One pull by Dr. Morlock and down I'd go.

Great job. Full-time hostage.

"Don't hurt him," Captain Fantasy said. He raised his voice, "Spaceboy! I'll get you out of this! Don't worry!"

But he wouldn't get me out of this, and I knew it, and he knew it too—I saw the anguish in his broad face, so open, so easy to read. He couldn't fly up here to save me; he'd never believed he could fly. They had him cold, and he'd do anything they said to save me. To save Spaceboy, the one he loved, the one he hadn't been able to save before, even if he didn't remember that failure.

"Do you accept, Captain Fantasy?" Blitz insisted.

"Yes," he said, his voice small. "Don't hurt him."

"No, Captain!" I shouted. "Don't do it! Tear them apart, forget about me!"

No one below reacted. They let me listen, but not transmit, for obvious reasons. And they could play this game again and again, I realized—just stick the Captain in a white room for a while until he forgot everything, then stage the scene again. He wouldn't get fed up, he wouldn't realize they'd never free Spaceboy. They probably wouldn't bother with me after a while, just dress someone else like Spaceboy. Wrap somebody in tin foil and the Captain would believe it was Spaceboy from this distance. This had been Kelli's plan all along, to get the Captain, the most powerful being

*Continued on page 72*

How can you **HEAL** yourself when  
you don't even know you're sick?  
Sometimes it takes a **LITTLE HELP**.

# DUST'S WINGS

The only painkiller Janie ever found that worked was her music. She was playing music now, letting the sounds and her breath carry her away to that other place where she wasn't so lonely and where the past didn't matter. In this world she may have been sitting on a busy sidewalk, her harmonica cupped between hands and mouth, people dropping coins into a coffee can in front of her. But in that world, none of this existed. In that world there were only the notes that swelled up in her chest, filling her body with energy and longing.

As she played, Janie was vaguely aware of the small crowd gathering around her. They dropped their money into her can, often furtively, as if they were embarrassed to be giving so little, or to be giving at all. Right now, though, Janie didn't care. She just played, and sometimes she sang. In this way, she stayed in that other place, the place where her parents' had never been murdered, as long as she possibly could.

Eventually she could draw it out no longer and she brought her song to an end. She let the last note linger on the harmonica, tongued it closed. Opening her eyes, she squinted up at the ring of faces circling her and let her hands drop to her lap. There was always a moment of quiet before the applause started. She rapped her harmonica on her thigh to knock the spit out and remembered to smile while the people clapped.

A dozen gray and white pigeons had landed around her as she played. They cooed and shuffled about, moving surprisingly close

to the feet of the onlookers who were filling by her bucket. Suddenly one man's face stood out of the crowd, his dark eyes stirring her body in a way that made her drop her gaze. A heart-beat later she looked up, but he was gone. Several new people were standing where he had been, smiling and dropping in their money. She watched them as they walked away.

"Shoo," she said, waving her hand at one of the pigeons. It was trying to perch itself on her bucket's edge. "You've got to find your own bucket. This one's mine."

"You finishing up for the day, then, Janie?" called a rough voice from up the street. It was old Abe, the newspaper man, breaking down his newsstand for the evening.

"Yeah," said Janie, deciding she was. "Hey, you get any new books today?" Janie slipped her harmonica in her shirt pocket and rummaged in her grimy canvas bag until she came up with an old paperback. She waved it at him. "I finished."

"I got a few things," called Abe, stacking newspapers. "Come have a look."

Janie finished transferring her money from can to pocket, and scooped up the bucket, coffee can inside. Abe stored it for her under his counter. Closing up shop took her about 30 seconds. Business in a bucket, ready to go.

"You're getting better on that thing," said Abe as she approached. He held his hands up to his mouth, playing air harmonica. "But I still like your voice best."

By Maya Lassiter • Illustration by Michael Kerr



"Thanks," Janie handed him her bucket, then twirled the used book rack around.

Why didn't you ever sing songs with words?" he asked. He was counting unsold magazines and scribbling the figures on a scrap of brown paper. "Why don't you ever have anything but romance novels?" she answered. "I hate those things."

Abe laughed. "I just take what comes, Janie."

"I guess I'll just give you this one back, then," she said. Another pigeon flew up and landed precariously on Abe's counter.

"Off!" said Abe, waving his hands at the bird. It took off but landed again only a few feet away.

"These are the pushiest pigeons," said Janie, watching.

"They only come around when you're here," Abe said. "You been feeding them?"

Janie shook her head.

"Well, it must be love, then. Those pigeons have fallen in love with you."

Janie laughed. "You know I only have eyes for you, Abe."

Dusi fluttered his feathered bodies, settling himself around the girl, Janie, and out of reach of the dark-skinned hook man. Dusi had been watching Janie for days, sometimes from the air, sometimes from the ground, usually both at once. Now, as she began her walk home, Dusi spread his many wings and took flight following her, his many eyes tracking her smallest movements. It was the perfect disguise—he looked like any other flock of pigeons, moving through the city streets. No one gave him a second glance and he could go where he pleased.

And he was pleased. This girl had called to him with her sorrowful music and her yearning and he had tracked that sound until he had found her. Now he was delighted to discover that her toughened exterior housed a sweet inner substance that Dusi couldn't wait to consume. Janie would be his newest seduction.

Together, girl and birds passed through the crowded streets and then through streets that were less crowded, the buildings closer together now and the street lights more thinly spread. He observed that she walked without fear, but that it was an act, put on because of her very great fear. That was a kind of courage, itself, Dusi thought. Her bulky coat and her man's felt hat disguised her gender and her youth, things that made her an automatic target to human men. They did nothing to disguise her from Dusi, of course, who accompanied her with the fascination he brought to each new prey.

"Hey there," Janie said, staring at one of Dusi's pigeons. It was balancing on the railing beside a closed metal door. Dusi brought his full attention to peer out of its eyes at her but she looked away, moving to knock sharply on the door. Dusi settled in to watch her from this vantage point, noticing the way she blurred her true self into her disguise, concealing herself by being no one at all.

In a moment, the door opened and a middle-aged Asian woman peered out. "Wait," the woman said, and then she gone.

Janie leaned up against the opposite railing to wait, and as she did so, Dusi began to read her thoughts, plucking them from her mind like ripening fruit. He was looking for her secrets, for his way in to her. There was always a way in.

First he sifted through the shallows: her friendly speech, her faked smiles, her surface thoughts. Dusi moved quickly through these, like hors d'oeuvres before a meal. Underneath the shallows he found a hypervigilance that matched her walk. But then she lived in a dangerous place and it was her constant search for danger that kept her alive. Dusi homed in on this and found himself swimming through the middle depths of her thoughts and caught in a swamp of grief and guilt. His momentum decelerated to nothing and it was several moments before he was able to shake off the stifling inertia of her pain.

Finally, he was under it and passing deeper in. Her grief had potential—though he preferred rage—but he needed something

more specific than general feelings to work with. Anyone could see the girl was sad. You only had to listen to her music to know that.

Ahhh, the music. That was the key. Excited now, Dusi moved through her mind more carefully. There was tragedy here, yes, parents dead, killed right in front of her. Her memories of sudden violence and her long wait alone in the dark for help bubbled up for Dusi's inspection. She had been so young!

But there was always tragedy, that was nothing new. It was something else in this girl that had caught his attention, something else that he hadn't seen before. Following the music to its source, he finally found it—a place inside of her that opened out into infinity, like a doorway into some other world. Dusi paused on its threshold, strangely afraid of what he would see on the other side. It reminded him of something from his own past, something so long ago that he had all but forgotten it entirely. But then his concentration shattered and he lost it.

"Here you are, dear," said the woman from the metal door, handing out a carton of food.

Startled by the woman's voice, Dusi jerked his attention back to himself too quickly. He took off in an explosion of wings, spiraling up between the tall gray buildings and toward the sky, scolding himself. He shouldn't have moved so deeply into the girl's mind while she was awake. He had been drawn in by what he found there, but he should have known better, should have waited for a time when he wouldn't be interrupted.

Dusi flew in many directions until he had a hold of himself again. Then he banked, the scattered birds coming back together under his control, until he found her down below among the dumpsters and street trash. From many eyes, he watched her as she walked past, eating noodles out of the carton with a pair of sticks.

He was surprised at how affected he had been by her mind. But the important thing, he reminded himself, was that he had gotten what he needed to draw her in. In moments, Dusi decided it was enough and in deciding, he allowed himself to coalesce. Leaving the birds all at once, they wandered, no longer held together by his will. Leaving them he created a man shape from the air, nothing too fancy, and he waited for her to come to him.

Janie scooped the noodles into her mouth without much thought. The restaurant's leftovers had been her dinner for weeks. It was a good arrangement, but she had long since lost the taste for Chinese food. It didn't matter. It kept her alive.

She was walking home, or what she called home right now, the top floor of an abandoned building, not yet demolished. She was stealing power from the building next door by running a cord from its roof to hers, but she had no furniture, and no running water. She had made a bed out of used clothes stuffed into mattress ticking. Her own clothes, spilling out of an old suitcase, a milk crate full of hooks, and a rusted, goose-neck lamp, were all she owned. In spite of its bareness, she liked the open space and the silence. And it was free, which meant the majority of her earnings from playing music on the street could go into the sock she kept pinned to the inside of her shirt. She had saved up several hundred dollars. Now, if only she knew what it was for.

She had rounded the last corner to her place and tossed the empty noodle carton into a city trash can when she came up short, startled by a man standing in her path.

"Hello," he said.

She recognized him immediately as the man who had gotten her attention earlier today by her coffee can.

"You following me?" she shot back. Adrenaline flooded her body. She was ready to run, waiting only for the signal to start.

The man smiled. It wasn't a bad smile. She might have smiled back if her heart weren't pounding in her throat.

"I didn't mean to startle you," he said.

"Yeah," she said, meaning nothing. Her building was behind him but she didn't want to go in if he was standing there. She could turn away but then he would know she had changed direc-

tions because of him. She didn't want to give him any clue that she lived nearby.

"You dropped that," the man said. He pointed to the ground and Janie flicked her eyes to see the empty carton. She had missed the trash can.

"You're Janie Greeley, right?" the man continued when she made no move to pick up the carton.

For the second time, Janie's heart stopped. She hadn't heard her last name in a long time. Who was this guy? Was he from social services? Those people hadn't bothered her since she turned 18 two years ago and they had dumped her on the street. But no, this

same color as her mother's hair. How could she have forgotten the color of her mother's hair? She looked back at the strange man. Maybe she had forgotten too much.

Dusi followed her to a diner, watching all the while how she moved, how her emotions flowed across her face in spite of her efforts to hide them. He ordered coffee, knowing he couldn't drink it. He held it in his hands, letting the warmth penetrate pleasantly to his fingers.

It was a good first step. She had to invite him, had to want him, in order for it to be any good. It was her own essence he would

## "The bad ones, the fallen angels, they brought knowledge."

guy was too young, too casually dressed to be government.

"Who are you?" she demanded. Maybe he was from one of the state homes she had lived in. But he was too old to have been one of the kids from the homes, not if he had been there at the same time she had.

"Dusi," the man said.

She watched him, waiting for more.

"I was a friend of your father's," he said. "Well, actually, his student."

Janie felt all the air rush out of her. "What?"

"I wasn't sure at first when I saw you on the street," he was saying, "but I recognize you. You're Janie, aren't you? You look like your mother."

Janie didn't know what to say. Her parents, killed six years ago in a mugging, had left her alone in the world. But she had survived that, plus four years in the homes, and two years on the streets and she had done it by thinking as little as possible about the life she had had before. It was gone; nothing could bring it back. She could go for days without even remembering it. And here was this guy, claiming to have been a part of it. It was unbearable.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said finally. She turned, began to walk away, fast.

"Janie, wait."

Her muscles tensed as she heard his feet hit the pavement behind her.

"Janie, I just want to talk to you. Your father meant a great deal to me. If there is anything I could do for you..."

"Yeah, you can get away from me!" she yelled. She kept walking.

"Janie," he called after her. Hadn't he given up yet? "I recognize the harmonica. It was his. The one he used to play at night after he was done with his teaching."

She had forgotten about that, about how he used to play at night. She had managed, with a trick of her mind, to not remember what it had been like to sit on his knee while he played, causing the instrument, so tiny in his huge hands, to make funny sounds that made her laugh. When her head cleared, Janie found that she had stopped walking, in spite of herself.

"How did you know that?" she said. He was walking up beside her.

"I told you, I was his student," he said. He was standing too close but she didn't move away. "I came around his house sometimes. I'm surprised you don't remember me."

Janie glanced at his face again, remembering nothing. The truth was, she had purposely forgotten so much she doubted she would remember him even if she had known him.

"What do you want?" she said.

"Just to talk, Janie. Just to talk, I promise."

She took a breath, remembering for the first time in a long while how her mother had laughed too, a low comfortable sound, how she had pushed her hair back behind her ears when her laughing made it slip free. Janie reached up and pushed her own hair back, looking at a strand as if she had never seen it before. It was the

same color as her mother's hair. How could she have forgotten the color of her mother's hair? She looked back at the strange man. Maybe she had forgotten too much.

It was a good first step. She had to invite him, had to want him, in order for it to be any good. It was her own essence he would

feed on and it could only be freely given, never taken, no matter what anyone said. So coffee, shared in a grungy diner, was a good first step. She had opened the door this much, which made it nearly certain that she would open it all the way. He lifted the cup to his lips and pretended to take a sip.

"I was so shocked when I found out about their deaths," he said. "I couldn't believe it."

He watched her as she stared out the window at nothing. He had to proceed carefully here. She was so skittish.

"I sometimes still don't," she finally said. "Believe it, I mean."

"Your music back there," Dusi said, "you're really good, you know that, right?"

She just looked at him.

"Are you studying anywhere? Studying music?" She shook her head again. He wanted to touch her hair, knew it would be soft and slippery between his fingers. Earlier he had pushed the memory of her mother's hair into her mind and it had worked, softening her toward him, encouraging her. He smiled. This one would be easy.

"You should think about it," he said. "You sounded just like him. And your voice! It's just like your mother's. She had the voice of an angel."

"When did you hear me sing?" she said sharply, her eyes focusing on his face.

Dusi cursed himself, realizing she hadn't been singing today, but quickly smoothed it over. "I heard you yesterday. I came back today because I had to know if it was you."

After a moment, she seemed to accept this.

"She did have the voice of an angel," she whispered. Her eyes had unfocused again, staring into the past. "Sometimes I think I feel them, when I'm playing, like they're angels watching over me."

Dusi nodded. "Did you know that the ancients spoke of angels called the Watchers?"

"No," she said. "Guardian angels?"

"The good ones were," he said, noticing how the light reflected in her irises. "The bad ones, the fallen angels, they brought knowledge."

"What kind of knowledge?"

"Desire, mostly. History. Other things."

"That doesn't sound so bad," she said.

"Everything has a price."

"Ah," she said. She looked at him over the rim of her cup. "So are you a guardian angel or a fallen angel then?"

Dusi started, sloshing coffee onto his fingers.

She laughed and helped him blot up the spill with a pile of napkins. "Anyway, you look sad enough to be a fallen angel."

Dusi leaned back, letting her dry his hands. "Why would a fallen angel look sad?"

She crumpled the napkins and looked around for a trash can. "Well, because they had lost their god, of course," she said.

"Wouldn't that make them sad?"

"Ah," he said, a tingle of surprise flowing through him. He was still thinking about her words hours later, clinging to the fire escape outside her window, his bird feet slippery on the cold metal.

How could she have seen into him so quickly? He was the seducer, not her. He knew he was the one who had brought the whole thing up but how could she have guessed at who he was or what he felt?

It had to be a coincidence.

Dusi shifted his weight on the railing, considering. Did he somehow want to be seen by her? Had he told her what he did because he wanted her to guess? But he'd never wanted that before. It wasn't the way it worked. She would see only what he wanted her to see—which was only what she wanted to see—until she had given herself over to him. That was the way of it. I'm the incubus, he thought. I'm the one who has the power here.

But the way she had looked at him, it was as if she had looked right past his disguise and had seen what lay under it. And what was that, exactly? It had been so long since he had been anything other than this. What would he be now, without his disguises?

And what had he been before?

Could he even remember?

From inside, a light turned on and Dusi peered through the broken window to watch Janie take off her coat and begin folding her cash into the sock she kept all her money in. She had traded the coins and ones for twenties in the diner. The waitress had rolled her eyes but Janie had left a huge tip anyway, twice the cost of her coffee.

I'll take her, Dusi said. She's just a girl like any of the others. That thought made him feel better.

Just then, Janie began to hum to herself. She was stripping off the baggy men's clothing she wore, revealing the young woman she really was. Her humming turned into a tune, sung only to herself, to keep herself company as she got ready for bed.

If I take her, Dusi thought suddenly, I'll never hear her sing like that again.

Do you think that dredging up the past is a good thing or a bad thing? Janie said, twirling Abe's book rack. Two days had passed since she had spoken with the strange man, Dusi. What kind of name was that, anyway?

"You're the philosopher today," Abe said, making change for a harried looking man.

"You've got a past, right?" Janie went on. "Everyone's got one. But what good does remembering it all do?"

"I think you're in over my head, girl," Abe answered, chewing on his mustache. "You gonna sing today?"

"I guess," Janie answered, looking over at her usual spot on the sidewalk.

"I don't know about your past," Abe said, drawing her back. "But I'm thinking of an idea for your future."

"My future?"

Abe nuzzled around under the counter and finally brought out a crumpled pink piece of paper. He handed it to her and she took it, warily.

"I know you probably aren't interested but I think you ought to go," he said as Janie scanned the flyer. "You're better than most of what they got out there, anyway."

The flyer was advertising open auditions at the music school downtown. Janie's eyes blurred when she read the name of the school. She hadn't let herself think of that place in years, another memory she had put away and forgotten. Why were all these memories coming to her now? She read the rest of the flyer trying not to think about how it was the school that Janie's father had taught at, the school her mother had been a student at when she had met Janie's father and fallen in love.

She handed the flyer back, roughly. "No thanks."

Abe took it from her, watching her face. "I guess I knew you'd say that," he said, putting it back under the counter.

"You know, I don't really feel like playing music today," Janie said, turning away. "I think I'll take the day off."

Abe nodded. "I'll see you later then." He leaned heavily on his hands on the counter, the way he always did as he waited for his next customer. "I guess I think the past is the past," he called after her. She turned back. "Unless you're living like it's the present."

Janie nodded, turning away, wondering what he meant.

She wandered for a while, buying an apple at a small market and eating it as she walked. Gradually she made her way to the YWCA where she could slip in for a shower if she were careful. Emerging an hour later, clean and still wet, she wandered some more until she came upon a prize and a puzzle all in one.

It was a rug, a huge, Oriental rug, real wool, she was sure of it, rolled up and sticking out of a dumpster behind a high rise of condos. Unrolling a corner of it revealed a wonderfully rich pattern of reds and greens. There would certainly be something wrong with it, probably something very wrong, once she unrolled it all the way, but she didn't care. She wanted it.

The rug was the prize but the puzzle was how she would ever get it to her building. It weighed a ton and she nearly killed herself wrestling it out of the dumpster as it fell the last of the distance, almost smashing her into a wall.

Staring at it, she wondered if Abe would help her. Then she wondered whether she wanted him to know where she lived. Abe was a friend but she had been on her own for so long that the thought of letting him or anyone else closer was unthinkable. So, what had she been doing with that Dusi guy?

"Forget it," she said out loud. It was a crazy idea, anyway. Her building was probably slated for demolition any minute. What was she going to do with a rug?

"Forget what?" said a voice behind her. She whirled.

It was Dusi.

"You are starting to seriously spook me," she said. "What are you doing here?"

"I could ask the same of you," he said. "As it happens, I'm staying with a friend in that building." He gestured to the highrise behind her.

Janie looked around as if the friend might appear any moment. She felt embarrassed. "Sorry," she said. Then she was embarrassed about the rug and then suddenly about her clothes and her damp hair, hanging down around her face.

He looked down at the rug. "Forget what?" he asked again.

She stuck her chin out, feeling stupid for feeling embarrassed and then hating feeling stupid. "This rug," she said. "I thought I'd take it but I can't get it home."

"I'll help," he said, already bending down to lift the end of the rug closest to him.

"No!" she said. "I mean—I decided I don't want it."

He looked up at her and then back down at the rug. "It's a pretty good rug. Is something wrong with it?"

"I don't know," she said.

"Let's find out."

What was wrong with it was a huge splash of purple vomit on one corner. Someone had had too much wine, Janie guessed. Finding the vomit caused both of them to gag and then laugh. But seeing the rug unrolled, even with the vomit, made Janie want it even more. It was beautiful.

The car wash was his idea. After a lot of panting and sweating, they managed to get the thing spread out under the hoses. They took turns feeding quarters into the machine and scrubbed until only a stain remained. Of course, wet, the rug weighed five times more and they had to enlist strangers just to drag it out into the sun to dry.

"Do you think anyone will take it if we leave it here for a while?" Janie asked, eyeing the sodden rug.

"They won't be able to lift it," replied Dusi. "Unless a whole bunch of people want it."

"Maybe a hockey team," said Janie. "They like rugs."

Dusi looked up the road, his expression serious. "None of those in sight."

They walked. Janie splurged on a hot falafel sandwich from an Iranian man's stall. Dusi ate nothing, but seemed to enjoy watching her burn her mouth, blowing and waving her hand in front of her lips.

"You look so much like your mother when you do that," he said, causing Janie to nearly drop her sandwich. She still was not used to the idea that someone she was talking to knew about her life.

"Tell me something about them," she said. "About my parents."

Dusi closed his eyes as he walked and Janie took another bite of falafel.

"I remember how much he wanted her to go on with her singing," he said. "But she stopped performing after you were born. He didn't want her to regret that later."

Janie nodded, remembering what she hadn't remembered in years. "Yes," she said. "Dad felt guilty for luring her away. I think he was always amazed that she had chosen him."

"She was very happy," Dusi said, closing his eyes again.

For a moment, Janie saw her mother so clearly in her mind it took her breath away. She was leaning on the door of Janie's old room, talking with Janie about nothing in particular. Janie lowered her sandwich and took a deep breath, afraid of the sharp sweetness that threatened to burst through her chest.

Then a flash of that other memory burned through her. The night in the park, her parent's crumpled bodies bleeding pools of dark fluid that Janie knelt in while she screamed for help. She couldn't leave them and even after the police had come, it had taken several of the large officers to pry her away from the stiffening bodies.

"Are you all right?" Dusi asked.

Janie shook her head, up and down, then back and forth. She was suddenly afraid that he would touch her, try to comfort her. But he didn't. In a moment she could breathe again.

"They loved you," he said.

She looked down at her half-eaten sandwich with distaste.

"Yeah," she said, finally.

Late in the day they returned and, re-rolling the mostly dry rug, they clumsily hoisted it onto their shoulders and began the trek to her building. She thought she must be crazy to let him see where

across it and then stood up, taking a few dancing steps across the woolen surface.

She smiled and started making up a song, dancing around the new space that was created by the borders of the rug. Her song took shape and for a moment she felt the lifting and opening that always happened in her heart when she let the music come through her, through the doorway inside of her. It was a doorway to home, held open, she thought, by her parents who had stayed with her as best they could, even though they had died. Maybe it was a doorway to where they were now—wherever that was.

Giving up singing, Janie started spinning around and around the way she had done when she was a little girl, spinning until she collapsed back onto her bed, laughing.

So this was what wanting was like.

Dusi had dematerialized at once and taken hold of the nearest bird he could find. Now he watched her dance on her new rug from his perch on the fire escape. She wore only her white underwear against her white skin, and in the darkened room, lit only by the streetlight that came in through the windows, she looked like a supernatural being.

He wanted her so much it made him shake. He had barely been able to leave her there, spread out on her bed. He had wanted to leap upon her, swallow her whole. He tried to tell himself that he had left because she wasn't ready yet to give herself to him. Which was true. He could feel her desire for him. His seduction was working.

Except that the truth was that his seduction wasn't working at all. He had to admit that somehow he was the one being seduced, not her. For the first time in a very, very long time, he was the one out of control. The truth was she hadn't asked him to leave, he had fled.

Because he didn't want to take her. Even as he strained with desire for her, he didn't want to end her.

Dusi had spent the day playing her memories like a harp, drawing out the stories from her past that would melt her fear and open her body to him as a source of comfort and trust and heat. It had worked marvelously. She had shut so many of her own memories away that his evoking scenes from her past was

HER SONG TOOK SHAPE and for a moment she felt the lifting and opening that always happened in her heart when she let the music come through her.

she lived, but she couldn't help feeling good about him. The way he laughed, the way he talked so easily about her parents—it relaxed her defenses. When they finally had the rug spread out in the middle of her floor, the bed repositioned with her lamp and her books, Janie was so tired she felt giddy, but she didn't care. She felt good.

Dusi left, and Janie lay on her bed, listening to his steps dwindling down the stairs. She was surprised to realize that just as she had wanted the rug, she wanted him. Was there some link between remembering and wanting? She didn't want to want him—she hardly knew him—but she knew what desire felt like. This was it.

Sleepily she sat up, began pulling off her clothes. She had gotten two showers today, one at the Y and the other at the car wash. She smiled remembering the look of shock and amazement on his face when she sprayed him with the hose. The rug was still damp and pleasantly cool. She brushed the soles of her feet

just as fresh to her as to him. As he reminded her of who she had been, a golden child had reawakened before his eyes. Could such a gentle push have been all she needed to help her to blossom?

I'll just leave, he thought. Find someone else. There are so many others to be eaten.

But thinking of the others, Dusi felt only emptiness. It shocked him. His old pleasure of the hunt was gone.

Suddenly, with anguish, Dusi also thought of what effect his disappearing with no word might have on her and immediately he couldn't stand the thought. So much had happened to her already in her life, he couldn't bear to reactivate her vigilance against pain. How ironic, he thought. I meant to take her life's energy but now I want only to protect it.

But what happens to an incubus who stops drinking life?

I'll die.

*Continued on page 70*



# Q&A WITH MICHAEL WILLIAM KALUTA

By Karen Haber

**M**ichael William Kaluta is an artist's artist. His mastery of line, color, composition, and detail make his elegant work the envy of his peers, with good reason. Fearlessly versatile, he moves from universe to universe, from Middle Earth to *Metropolis*, from books to comics, theatrical productions to posters, and of course, don't forget his work on *The Shadow*, Carson Napier's *Venus*, and Kaluta and Lee's own *Starstruck*.

Born in 1947, Kaluta caught the drawing bug from Jon Gnagy's *Learn to Draw*, a 1950s TV series. He went on to study art at the Richmond Professional Institute (now Virginia Commonwealth University) from 1966 to 1968.

Kaluta was hired by DC Comics in 1969 to contribute various filler stories and covers before receiving the assignment on which he "made his bones": his now-classic art for *The Shadow* comic book, based on the radio show and pulp-magazine character. Although he did only five issues and eight covers between 1973 and 1975, his moody, atmospheric work literally propelled him to the front ranks of comic book artists.

In the 1980s he collaborated with Elaine Lee on set designs, posters, and the adaptation of her play *Starstruck* to comics. In addition, Kaluta created covers for Marvel and DC on such titles as *Batman*, *Detective*, *Vampirella*, *House of Mystery*, *House of Secrets*, *Books of Magic*, and *Conan the King*.



A cover illustration  
for Creepy Magazine.  
OPPOSITE TOP: CD  
cover illustration for  
Danzig 4. OPPOSITE  
BOTTOM: Three  
illustrations with  
elements of magic  
and the occult (left to  
right): Never Say Die,  
Hole in the Sky, and  
Sabra Cadabra.





Black Aria was painted for Glenn Danzig's CD cover. OPPOSITE TOP: Kaluta's interest in Art Nouveau and Art Deco is evident in Donna Mia 2. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Theoden Espies the Serpent Banner appeared in the 1994 J.R.R. Tolkien calendar.

He is particularly noted for marrying early 20th-century illustration influences from the Art Nouveau works of Aubrey Beardsley and Alphonse Mucha with Art Deco patterns from the 1920s and 1930s, inserting nuanced, detailed artwork into the comics and illustration field. The *World Encyclopedia of Comics* describes Kaluta as an "antiquarian-futurist who visually romances the future with the lyrical lines of the past."

About Tolkien, Kaluta has written: "I first read *The Lord of the Rings* about a year after I first read *Metropolis*. It, too, became a book that I would read over and over and, like *Metropolis*, I never thought to illustrate it. I'd done some crabbed little drawings on a letter I sent to J.R.R. Tolkien, but the world and the characters were beyond my 1964 talents.

"Fourteen years later I did a series of pencil drawings in an attempt to acquire the commission for the 1979 JRR Tolkien calendar. The calendar went to others and my art was put away for some time. Years later, I was contacted about doing the 1994 calendar. As overwhelming as the task seemed, I said yes immediately. To this day, the illustrations are the best series of pictures I've ever made. I still read *The Lord of the Rings* about once a year."

The artist is equally articulate on the topic of heroes: "I have been taught since high school that the human figure is the key to art. Even when no figure is present in the piece it still must relate to the viewer in human terms. Most of my work has the figure as the central element, and my best work redefines the human in the context of the picture. In my early work, I concentrated on the world I was drawing, then added the figures in, as if they were tourists. [However] for the past 20 years, the figure begins the art process and the world grows around it."

And on comics and illustration, he has this to say: "Each field has its attractions. Comic book drawing allows one to create an entire world, to add the characters, the lighting, the 'camera angles,' the pacing that will involve the reader for hours on end. Doing that right brings great satisfaction, though it does take a great amount of time to accomplish.

"Illustration must augment whatever it is illustrating—at best it shouldn't overpower its subject. But doing illustration gives artists such a huge canvas to devote their vision to, along with certain approaches and techniques that only work when presenting a single image."

Michael William Kaluta casts wide his artistic net, and some of his "catches" can be seen in the recent collections *Wings of Twilight: The Art of Michael Kaluta* (NBM

Books), and *Ecboes: The Drawings of Michael Kahuta* (Vanguard Productions).

**ROF:** What was the strangest commission you ever took on?

**MWK:** Much easier to describe the strangest commissions I didn't take on: One: A T-shirt idea/visual pun on Hard Rock Cafe with a rooster in the center. Not "Hard Rooster Cafe." Also, ghosting for an artist who was ghosting for Harold Grey on the Little Orphan Annie dailies. I couldn't quite justify the anonymity. Then there was designing a logo for a Web organization that promoted "conservative family values," with a vengeance! But here's some of the more unusual commissions I have done: designed a clothing label, those tags that hang on sweaters in the department stores; designed a logo for a restaurant based on the owner's German shepherd, eventually to appear on the restaurant's matchbooks and all the ads in the local newspapers. Designed a small storybook for a friend's wedding based on a story the groom wrote, and borrowing freely from the Russian artist Bilibin when I did it; designed an in-house product flyer for Singer Sewing Machines, with Charlie Vess, for their Christmas employees' bargain shopping. Another, similar commission: drawing "superhero"-type characters for a trade journal aimed at MBAs—one a Superman-like flying businessman and the other a huge Monsterman crashing through a wall, representing all the worst stuff that could happen to a salary man. All pretty tame stuff.

**ROF:** What was your favorite commission and why?

**MWK:** Favorite commission recently: the 2002 Celtic Calendar—because it was such a freeing assignment. The only "rules" were the size constraints and that the images have some relation to the Celtic world. Elaine Lee helped immensely, doing the research on the Celtic myths and legends. She's quite knowledgeable in that area. Add to that the 1994 Tolkien Calendar, just because I was so successful nailing down scenes I thought I'd never be able to do. What happens with nearly every commis-

sion: once I get "into" it, I have a great time. Sometimes the most fun in doing commissions becomes the "worst thing I was ever involved with," when the clients either flake on the project or change their minds on what they want after the job is done.

**ROF:** Why do you think that fantasy art has such great appeal? Is it the color? The form? The promise of escape?

**MWK:** When I was growing up, in the

1950s, the only allowed fantasy art was what Walt Disney was doing with his animated films. Comic books were under a cloud and all the fantasy and fairy tale books one remembered were from the 1930s and 1940s, read as a child. Then, on the one hand, Dover Books started reprinting terrific art from the turn of the century, and Ace Books started re-publishing the fantasy works from the teens and 1920s, starting with Edgar Rice Burroughs and then, in 1963, Tolkien. The writing engendered art—at first, dull, misapplied modern covers (with the noted exception of Roy Krenkel and Frank Frazetta), then eventually letting the works inspire cover art that revived the Golden Age of Illustration. Aubrey Beardsley and Mucha and Dore were at the forefront of the rediscovered artists whose creations found a resonance in the 1960s public—it has grown and grown since then.

**ROF:** What's more satisfying to you as an artist, working with pattern and detail or with color? It is challenging to integrate both?

**MWK:** The most satisfying thing for me is nailing down the concept—getting "sense" onto the page. Sometimes it is content but most times it is design that gives me the real jolt. The textures and colors come later for me.

**ROF:** Sometimes your work seems to be so filled with detail that the viewers may wonder if you are challenging yourself—and them—to see how much you can fill the picture plane while still making the image "readable." Is that your intent?

**MWK:** Nope—if you look at my images in comparison with, say, Dürer, you'll see that I've used a shorthand to imply detail, not drawn everything. In my drawings/paintings there's most often a solid shape to hold the picture on

the page, then I involve myself with adding the details. Often the detailing is included as a tone, as opposed to an object, to add a sense of depth or implied meaning to the art. Most all of the detail is very thought out, as opposed to detail for its own sake.

**ROF:** Why are both pattern and color so compelling to us?

**MWK:** Both pattern and color are sensual experiences. Like cats, human eyes see



shape first, along with motion—then the details. That is why one can recognize a friend from a hundred yards' distance. Color, like smell, has a number of levels of impact, but, like smell, our reactions to color are often described as "mood" reactions.

**ROF:** What's your favorite medium?

**MWK:** Pencil—and ballpoint pen. Then pen and ink.

**ROF:** Your favorite color? (No, this is not an old Monty Python routine!)

**MWK:** Red, all by itself, a warm red. Least favorite, if you'd like to know, is green. But that is color as color. In *Nature*, color has context beyond the palette.

**ROF:** Your favorite character(s)?

**MWK:** In comics? The Spirit; Hopey and friends from *Mechanics/Love and Rockets*, and all of Gilbert Hernandez's characters; *The Rocketeer* and characters from that comic book. The characters in *Starstruck* are particular favorites, of course. I also like Dennis the Menace, naturally, Gary Larson's characters, Astroboy, Daffy Duck, Popeye and Sweet Pea, the entire cast of *King of the Hill*, 7 of 9 and the Doctor from *Voyager*, all the characters on *Farscape*, Magnum PI, the Iron Giant and Hogarth and his mom and the cool sculptor—shall I go on?

**ROF:** What makes a character appealing to you in a way that enables you to capture him or her on canvas?

**MWK:** It's that implied depth that comes either from "spending time" with the character, or having that feeling that the character's creator spent time with the character.



**ROF:** How does the creative process differ for you when doing album covers as compared to doing comic or book covers? Is there any difference in concept or composition?

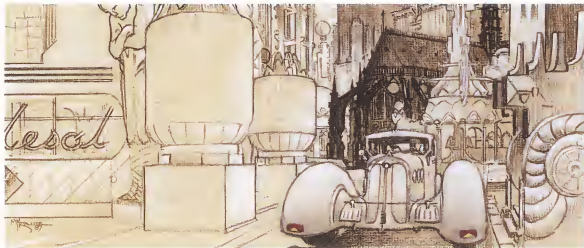
**MWK:** Oh sure. The CD covers rarely have a "character" central to the product, so the image I do is often symbolic of the energy and intent of the tunes on the CD. Composition is easier on the CDs as the title will almost always be small and at the top of the art. I know the art is basically square and can work within those limits. The comic book cover needs to present the character inside in a way that the reader

will recognize them—or he surprised at how they are represented. The more covers for a comic-book series, the easier and more creative the art becomes. That also, of course, depends on the editor. Same same with the CDs.

**ROF:** What is it about *Metropolis* (the book by Thea von Harbeau and silent film by Fritz Lang) that is so fascinating? Specifically, why does that female robot have such iconic power—over so many decades (nearly a century)?

**MWK:** The female robot has all sorts of resonances. Can it be that a redesigned woman, created by man and unable to reproduce herself, somehow answers the deep awe men have toward biological women? And if so, what happens when the robot controls the man? In the book, Futura was to be a mechanical man, to replace the human workers under *Metropolis*. It is the inventor/ designer Rotwang who makes the robot in the shape of

a woman—to assuage the loss of the woman both he and Fredersen loved when they were young men. It was the vision and memory of loss that controlled his hands. Add to that that the son of Joh Fredersen falls in love with a woman who looks exactly the same as his mother, that the inventor, at Joh Fredersen's insistence, puts her face and body on the robot, in effect recreating a lost love and the creatrix of all the men concerned, then using the robot/woman to destroy everything they've created, including Joh Fredersen's son—well, how could that image not resonate throughout the ages?



**ROF:** What is it about Art Nouveau and Art Deco that continues to fascinate us? What fascinates you as an artist about these different stylistic approaches? Do they require color to make an impact or can line carry them?

**MWK:** Color is incidental to both styles, in the abstract, but one can evoke both styles with just color—mauve, pink, peach, and yellow and you have Art Nouveau. Silver and black and you have Deco. Nouveau and Deco—both were reactionary in their time: Nouveau as a reaction against the new machine age, Deco a reaction against the overindulgence of Nouveau and a refining of “beauty is the promise of function.” Pure Nouveau is a bit much for most people these days, as is “pure” Deco. Both have been adjusted so we feel pleased when we note a nuance of either. They have been digested.

**ROF:** Have you ever used digital/computer tools?

**MWK:** Yes, of course—mostly to “tweak” the art done with traditional tools.

**ROF:** Would you like to comment on the theft/disappearance of your work at Comicon so that readers of *Realms of Fantasy* will know what to look for?

**MWK:** I’m still hoping it was an accidental thing, something put into a portfolio by mistake. As both missing pieces were in the same sleeve, it can be that. There are images of the missing pieces posted on my Web site [www.kaluta.com](http://www.kaluta.com).

**ROF:** You mentioned in an interview that you’d like to illustrate Flaubert’s *Salammbô*—why that particular choice?

**MWK:** It’s an opulent book. I was approached years ago to do a 44-page graphic novel—well, impossible! So, if ever, it needs to be illustrated. Pick up a copy and read two pages.

**ROF:** Do you prefer working on covers or full-length stories?

**MWK:** Covers these days, though the call of storytelling is getting strong again—who knows?

**ROF:** When you are working, do you listen to music? If so, what kind? (What groups?) If you’re working on an album cover, do you listen to the group’s music and does that affect your artistic decisions?

**MWK:** I generally listen to unabridged books on tape while working. When I listen to music, I listen to genres until I’m full of the themes ... say, bluegrass, or Pink Floyd ... then I go for a lot of silence ... more than most people, apparently. When commissioned to do a CD cover, I’ve never listened to the music until after I’ve done the cover ideas. I rely on the lyrics to inspire the imagery (the one exception to this is Glenn Danzig’s *Black Aria*. It is a



**ABOVE:** The Destruction of Futura is one of many illustrations created for *Metropolis*. **OPPOSITE TOP:** Magic is created through style, color, and and intriguing musical instrument in *Resounding*. The Chimes of Glass. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** Another illustration from *Metropolis*.

symphonic album).

**ROF:** Would you consider yourself a romantic/futurist as an artist/illustrator? If not, how do you characterize your work?

**MWK:** I feel I’m just an illustrator. I have no philosophy behind what I do except to try to evoke the sensibilities of the thing

illustrated. I like presenting a world that feels full grown, as if there’s more beyond the edges of the picture frame. Fantasy and Sci-Fi are easier than historical in the fact that I can make things up that suggest reality as opposed to tons of research to nail reality. ♦



## Experience random monster encounters with *Legaia 2*'s boy Lang.



From Edios for the PlayStation2, *Legaia 2* is a fantasy role-playing game in the *Final Fantasy X* tradition. It's a basic "orphaned boy grows up to save the world" story, where the character accumulates experience and companions until he faces the big menace at the end. Its graphics are good, but *L2*'s cut scenes aren't as killer as *FFX*'s and its story is weaker. *Legaia 2* should take about 50 hours to play, though it will be shorter for players who let the game automate the turn-based combat.

The story follows a boy named Lang; he must retrieve the sacred aqualith or else his village is doomed. He quickly finds himself in over his head, but he also discovers hints about the birthmark he has on his

chest. Along the way, Lang meets lots of characters, some of whom mean him ill and others who join him in his quest. About 15-20 hours into the game, Lang succeeds in returning the stone to his small village, only to realize it is his destiny to save the whole world. The designers have added a couple of innocent love interests and a master to guide Lang by this point in the game.

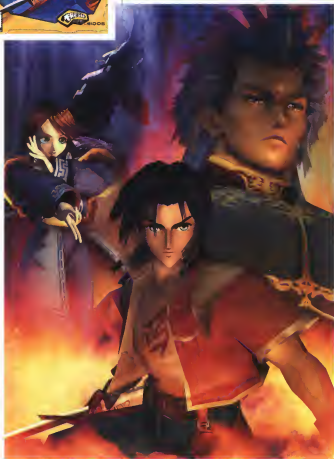
The basic game play is similar to *FFX*. Players move Lang around each level, triggering random monster encounters, until they reach the next "event." An event is usually a cut scene where more of the story unfolds, often ending in a combat with one of the level bosses. The story is very linear; some wandering is allowed but doing so usually just delays arriving at the next event.

Combat is turn-based and each character can be assigned to different types of action: Attack, Item, Guard, or Origin. Choosing to Attack brings up the TAS system, which basically allows the player to choose combinations of Left, Right, Up, or Down for each block or move the character has. Lang starts with three, but is up to seven blocks by the two-thirds point. Certain combinations like Right-Down-Right result in a powerful attack called an Art. The normal Arts raise the character's Attack points and do moderately more damage. The character can also learn Super Arts that will cost it Attack points, but result in a more powerful Attack than normal Arts. In addition, through game events, the character can learn Hyper-Arts that cost the most Attack points but are devastating to opponents. Later in the game, the player can combine Arts between the characters to unleash combinations that are even more powerful.

Choosing Item allows the character to use any combat or healing items currently carried by the party. Choosing Guard simply allows the character to increase his defense and activate any defensive skill currently selected. Choosing Origin allows

characters who have awakened the elemental spirit within them to access the powers of that spirit to attack opponents, or use the spirit's other defensive or healing powers.

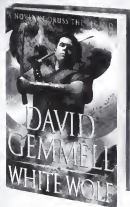
The Origins are a big part of the game. An Origin is a spirit that is bound within some humans. The Origin is dormant in the person, with the only sign of its presence being a strange birthmark. Humans who have awakened their Origin spirits are known as Mystics. Lang knows nothing of this when he sets out, and though he's given many hints, he doesn't put it together for a while. When the time comes to



*Legaia 2*'s main character, Lang, goes on a journey in search of the sacred aqualith to save his village from doom.



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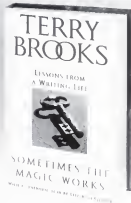


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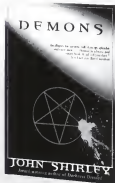
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awaken his Origin, Lang climbs to the top of a mountain to fight a creature that he can't hurt through normal means. He must fight, or at least take a beating until he's practically dead, then the Origin awakens and Lang can return the beating he's been getting. Now, why the Origin didn't come to Lang's aid earlier in the game when he was hung by shackles and beaten to a pulp, the game doesn't explain. Each Origin is based on some elemental power, and Lang's Origin is based in fire, thus all his powers are fire-based and they work best against water-based creatures.

The designers of *L2* added some features to keep the players busy. There are side games that can earn Lang several nice items. The player can also have the characters cooking in camp, which imparts bonuses as well as minuses, based on what they've cooked. The characters pick up recipes and ingredients as they wander, and when they camp they can cook any recipe that they have the ingredients for.

The most complex part of the game is the items. There are ways to combine items in the characters' possession to create better ones. This can be done with weapons, armor, and accessories. These items not only increase the characters' powers but they also provide characters with skills. In a strange choice, the game uses items to impart skills to the characters, as well as pluses and minuses to their stats. The game allows players to select one active offensive and one defensive



skill for each character at a time. To do this the character must first have the item equipped, then accumulate enough experience while it's equipped, then the character can use the skill.

Overall, those who loved *Final Fantasy* will like *Legaia 2*. Players may've never tried the FF series may well love *L2* on its own merits.

In *Arx Fatalis*, an RPG for the PC from JoWood, the player takes the role of a character who's lost his memory and is in a small cell at the beginning of the game. This is a popular beginning for RPGs because it means that the character and the player are on an equal footing; as the character learns about its surroundings, so does the player. What the player and character learn here is that *AF* is a world where the sun has gone out and civilization has picked up and moved beneath the surface of the earth, seeking the earth's heat to replace the sun's.

The setting means that *AF* is strictly a dungeon crawl. There are no scenes under the black sky. Fortunately, the caverns and tunnels are well drawn, very detailed, and amazingly interactive. Characters are able to pick up just about everything. The things they pick up can be highly useful things like potion ingredients, or they can simply be things to move and throw around.

Players create their character by allocating points to four core attributes and then using skill points to buy various skills, such as archery, various forms of magic, stealth, and specialized knowledge. Killing things and completing quests gain the character experience levels that let it improve its attributes and skills. Players don't have to create combat specialized characters, but the character had better be able to fight at least a little, or it won't survive long.

*AF* is easy to control and the beginning levels are basically a tutorial, introducing move-

ment, combat, and magic. Combat is mostly up close and personal. The left mouse button causes the character to rear back to strike, and charging does even more damage. Critical hits and sneak attacks are both double. The animation and sound for successful hits and misses are both great, injured enemies will run away, and crits yield some ugly-looking effects.

Magic is harder to master because the character's spells are cast by the player by making the proper hand gestures. The player does this by tracing the proper runes with the mouse. There are 50 different spells that do all the usual fantasy RPG effects, some of them critical to finishing the game or winning a fight. Since the player can't draw symbols in the middle of a battle any better than the character can, the game lets the player queue up several spells at a time for instant casting based on hot keys.

The only down part of *AF* is that it is all underground, but the detail and atmosphere make the tunnels their own world, and just as interesting and scary as any sun-filled one might have been.

*Dragon's Lair 3D*, from Ubisoft for the Xbox, is an odd sort of sequel, considering that the original was released 20 years ago. The first *Dragon's Lair* was an

arcade hit that employed the then-new technology of laser disk to create an interactive cartoon adventure. The cartoons were designed by Don Bluth's studio. The animation would play along, and at certain points the player could direct the action with a button and a joystick. It was basically a choose-your-path adventure with a twitch element. If you didn't choose just the right direction at just the right moment, you generally killed the character, a blundering knight named Dirk the Daring.

Dirk is back for *DL3D*, as is his perpetual quest object, Princess Daphne. A very short cut scene at the beginning of the game shows Singe the Dragon and the evil Wizard Mor-droc carrying Daphne off to their ruined castle. Dirk rushes in pursuit and the game begins with Dirk at the foot of the walls. Players take over, trying to break into the castle, find the scattered power-ups, and fight and run and jump and roll their way to Daphne.

The best thing about the game is that players can save at any point in the game. This simple fact will spare the player hours of reloading and facing again the same challenges. There is some fighting to *DL3D* but there is far more jumping and puzzle solving, and failing to make a jump or solve a puzzle is nearly always fatal. It is much easier to reload that game than to start over from the beginning of the level.

*Buff the Vampire Slayer. Director's Screen* for the *BVS Roleplaying Game* from Eden studios is the perfect supplement for game mas-



ters who like advice on how to run a campaign and those who, in particular, like to have something to run.

The *DS* does in fact come with a handsome screen that game masters can use to shield their notes from the players. On one side are the most often used tables and charts from the rulebook, and on the other side are pictures from the TV series. Bundled with the screen but not attached to it is a 56-page booklet that contains 12 pages of advice on running a *BVS* campaign, and three connected adventures to run players through. These three adventures are connected to the introductory adventure in the main rulebook, so all four of them together make a good campaign.

The advice is good and particularly relevant to the world of *BVS*. The adventures are vanced and contain lots of things for all sorts of characters to do. There are lots of interesting and fully statted-up nonplayer characters. The setting is specific enough to be useful, but vague enough to be adapted to any place the players have set a campaign. The only complaint is that there aren't enough maps. Other than that it is a great supplement.

The *Elder Scrolls III: Tribunal*, a *Morrowind* Expansion from Bethesda Software for the PC is more role-playing goodness for the best computer RPG of the year, a year that was chock-a-block with really good RPGs.

*Tribunal* is huge and sprawling and far from linear, like the other *Elder Scrolls* adventures, but different from those other games, in that the action of this one is focused in, around, and under one city. The city is Mournhold, the capital city of the Imperial Province of Morrowind. The quests, plots, and intrigues that the players' characters have gotten involved in in previous games have often emanated from Mournhold, so its precincts and denizens will be well known by reputation to players of the other games in the series, but this is the first time that action has centered here. It is the player's first chance to meet many of the characters they have heard of.

Despite the size and importance of the city, players will have very little trouble getting around as it contains the royal palace and four separate districts, but each of the districts comprises only a few buildings and landmarks. Also, the city is populated only by nonplayer characters who are involved in the story. This may seem odd, but it is brilliant. Players don't

have to spend lots of time walking past buildings whose presence is purely cosmetic, or waste hours chatting with NPCs who can't help them. This is a true example of when less is more.

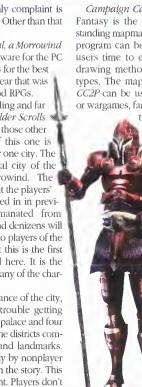
The new quests in *Tribunal* are more than just "go kill this then bring that here." Characters get to try being a matchmaker or spying on the unfaithful, and even stride the boards as an actor. There are some game-play improvements, but mostly they are just formalizing plug-ins that most players who have finished *Morrowind* will have already installed. New monsters have been added and some of the old ones have been improved. There are new plants and new alchemy ingredients. Players can also purchase pets, the most useful of which are the pack rats because they can carry the character's treasure.

Players who finished *Morrowind* but want more to do in the world will love this expansion. Players who don't own *Morrowind* should go get it.

*Campaign Cartographer 2 Pro* from ProFantasy is the latest version of their outstanding mapmaking software for the PC. The program can be learned in minutes, giving users time to explore the huge choice of drawing methods, map styles, and design types. The maps and designs created with *CC2P* can be used with role-playing games or wargames, fantasy, modern, or science fiction.

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## ice singing

Continued from page 27

helmet with bright red flames. Her husband's name is Steve and he looks very happy. Steve and Steph. You want to send an e-mail to warn her.

About what?

Your bed feels very big that night, almost as big as the lake. You are lost in it and Beth's side is freezing.

The next morning you congratulate yourself for waking up. You have survived the first Christmas. You walk outside to get the *Globe*. The paper is heavy with ads. Take those presents back, you cheerful fuckers, and buy something new! But there is no news. Nothing ever happens on Christmas. For example, businessmen don't get frozen in ice. Back in the house, you hover in the kitchen. You've been hovering a lot lately—you forget what you're doing. Breakfast, that's it. You wake up, get the paper, *have breakfast*. You shake Raisin Bran into a bowl and scan the sports page. Then you notice that you are pouring orange juice over the cereal. The phone rings.

"Hello."

You hear the whisper of static, but no reply. You say it again. "Hello."

The phone clicks and a telemarketer says, "I would like to speak to Beth Anstruther."

"She's not interested." You hang up and put on your skates.

Your man is still there, but he has moved. Yesterday both arms were at his sides. Now he has raised his right hand as if he's waiting to be called on. He has something important to say, something that can't wait until ice out. Or else he's waving goodbye. You get down on your hands and knees. He's about your size but he's older, balding, dead. The ice here is glossy and strangely transparent. Like a lens magnifying the bottom of the lake. You see boulders and rocks and mud. Dark oak leaves, a pale Budweiser can, the glitter of gold. The ring must have slipped off the man's finger.

His blue suit has thin chalk stripes. The Escher tie has come out of the vest. Green birds turning into blue fish. His eyes are the same—fixed, frozen. The fingers of his upraised hand are curled.

"What?"

The sound of your own voice scares you. You shouldn't be talking to dead people. What if they talk back?

You spend the rest of the morning in your living room, staring at the lake. The lake is singing again today, but by noon only mounds echo off the hill behind your house. The sky has turned to granite. Last night Weather.com was predicting four to six inches of snow. You convince yourself that you will stop worrying about your man in the ice once the storm buries him.

The doorbell rings and you bolt off the sofa, nerves twitching. Rachel, the mail lady, is at

the front door. She's holding a magazine wrapped around a thick stack of letters and a long, thin box wrapped in brown paper.

"Package for you," she says. "Probably a late Christmas present. Didn't fit in the mailbox."

You take it all from her but you can't find your voice. In the silence, you notice that Rachel has had her nose pierced since you last saw her. There's a drop of gold just above her left nostril. She's 32 and divorced and the boys at the town dump love to gossip about her.

"Looks like we're in for some weather," she says, and then she really sees you. A shadow passes over her face. "You OK, Mr. A?"

"The flu," you say. "Don't let me breathe on you."

As soon as she is gone, you run to the bathroom to look at yourself. Not good. Your eyes are like wounds. And you haven't shaved in three days. Has it been three days already? Oh, they'd be talking about you in town, all right. First at the Post Office, then at Lil's Grill.

You throw *Time* away. You don't care who the "Man of the Year" is. Besides, that's her magazine. Most of the letters are junk. There are bills from Sprint and DIRECTV and three straggling Christmas cards. One of them is from Beth's sister Margaret. It is addressed to *The Anstruther Family*.

"What family?" you say. You open the card and read,

*In this holiday season*

*May your home and loved ones*

*Be blessed with peace and harmony*

Underneath it she has written, "Hope you're OK, Margaret." A cramped little greeting from the human fucking cramp.

You open the package last. It's a present from your mom. You're surprised she didn't call yesterday. She's probably waiting for you to call her. Like that might ever happen. You haven't told her yet. You haven't told anyone. How can you?

As soon as you get the wrapping paper off, you know it's a tie. The box is white and has a nubby finish. You pry the top off.

Your mother has sent you one of those Escher ties, green geometric birds turning into blue fish. You feel as if someone is pressing thumbs into your eyes because you know now, you know:

You fling yourself at the stairs. You yank down the trap door to the attic and scramble up. You pull the chain on the bare lightbulb so hard that it breaks. You see the present almost immediately. It's the right shape. The weight tells you everything. Red wrapping paper with snowmen in top hats. Rip, rip it. It's cold up here. You can see your breath. Your finger feels swollen as you slip it between the top and bottom of the box. You tear open your Christmas present from Beth.

It's blue, of course, with chalk stripes. Jacket, trousers, vest. Outside, the ice is singing. To you. ♦

## dusi's wings

Continued from page 59

Dusi lost his balance for a moment on the fire escape and his wings fluttered and flapped until he regained his perch. He peeked back in the window and saw her just as she spun herself too dizzy to stand. He could hear her giggling laughter as she felt to the lumpy thing she called a bed and his bird's chest drew tight until he thought he wouldn't be able to breathe.

It doesn't matter if I die, he thought, watching her. I can't take her. Every particle of me wants to but I can't. I won't.

But even as he thought this, he could feel the fine tremor of his hunger building.

Suddenly, on the other side of the window, Jane turned the light on and began pulling her pants back on.

"Dusi!" she called out, hopping and then running toward her door.

Dusi's heart beat faster as he stared through the window.

"Dusi! Wait!" she called, clattering down the stairs.

Dusi spread his pigeon wings and spread his awareness out until he felt another bird on the other side of the building. Automatically he entered it more fully and watched as Janie emerged from a side door, pushing it open with a scraping sound as it dragged across the cement landing. She ran lightly to the corner and peered around it into the dark.

She's looking for me, he thought.

"Dusi?" she called quietly, looking up and down the street.

Before he could think he left the bird, drawing himself together into his man shape in the shadows beyond her vision.

"I'm here," he said, stepping into the light.

"Oh!" she started, spinning around. "I thought you'd be gone by now."

"Then why were you calling me?" he answered, breathless from his journey into matter.

She shrugged. "I hoped you weren't."

They looked at each other for several moments. Dusi could barely recognize the feelings pouring through his body.

"Come back upstairs," she said finally, softly. No! Dusi thought.

But she held out her hand to him, drawing him in and he stepped toward her. When she touched him, he realized he was shaking.

They made their way up the dark stairs. Her lump was still burning and she still held his hand as she led him toward the rug—the crazy rug—that she had wanted so much.

"Come here," she said, and he did and then he knew only the touch of her and the taste of her. She pulled his shirt off, pulling him down to her mattress. Almost at once he felt the filling begin, the pouring in of life's essence inside of him. She was giving herself to him. He jerked away in fear, stop-

ping the flow, not wanting to drain her, not wanting to take what he wanted to take more than anything.

"What is it?" she said.

"I can't ... I can't...." he whispered. I won't hurt you.

"Shhh..." she whispered back. She took his head against her chest and stroked his hair as he lay shivering against her. She began to sing softly to him, her voice like light and he felt that strange doorway open inside of her, felt himself at the edge of its threshold once again.

An old memory surfaced from his distant past. It flashed through him, with startling clarity.

It was a memory of singing.

Dusi gasped. He hadn't thought of that in centuries. How it felt to lift his eyes and his voice, the huge blue arc of the world beneath him, the light around him, and the music within him merging into one textured substance of grace.

How had he lost that?

In the moment of asking, an answer came.

You tried to fill yourself with others because you refused to fill yourself with Me. Dusi's eyes flew open in surprise. He hadn't heard that voice in a long, long time.

"What is it?" Janie asked again.

He drew a breath. "I think I just heard the voice of God," he whispered.

She kissed the top of his head. "Well, I

know I'm hearing Him," she said.

He turned to look at her face. "What does He say?"

She pushed him, playfully, rolling his body over until she way laying on top of him. "He's saying, 'Live! Live!'"

Dusi laughed. "So He is!" he cried. And then, "Yes," and "yes."

They kissed until they were breathless. This time he didn't push her away. He was letting himself fill again but it was different now. It was music but it wasn't coming from her.

Later, Dusi knelt over her in the darkness, feeling full of that which he had lost so long ago. She lay curled up, half asleep, her hair falling across her face. He brushed it back. He hadn't needed to take anything from her, after all.

"You're not a fallen angel anymore, are you?" she asked, her voice soft with sleep.

"Why do you say that?" he asked, surprised.

"You don't look sad anymore."

He touched her face lightly and then stood, shaking out his wings. The pure white of them lit up the dark room with soft phosphorescence. He smiled, spreading them for the pleasure of it. They were wide and strong and he was flooded with sudden gratitude. It had been a long time since he had remembered his true form.

"You're beautiful," she said.

Dusi had a moment of fear, wondering if

he should hide. Then he thought he never wanted to hide again.

"So are you."

"You're going then?" she said sleepily.

"Yes," he said. "But you'll be all right."

"All right," she said so softly that he wondered if she were really awake.

"I'll be watching you."

"Hey there, girl," called Abe from behind his newsstand counter. "I was wondering when I'd see you again. How did it go?"

Janie twirled the book rack. "Well," she said slowly, drawing it out. "I got in."

"Janie!" From the look on his face, she wondered if he would jump the counter. "I knew you could do it!" he said, grinning. "That's marvelous!"

"It doesn't hurt to have a dead father who used to teach there," she said, grinning back. "They were falling all over themselves when they realized who I was."

"So you got some friends there, then?"

Janie shrugged. "Maybe. Allies, anyway."

Abe nodded. "So you'll be moving on. They giving you a place, right?"

"Yes," she said. "And all the music classes I can stand."

"Well, I know you'll do fine," said Abe, taking off his glasses and wiping them on his shirttail. "You'll do just fine. You got people watching out for you and all."

"Yeah," said Janie.

And she smiled. ☺



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## lost men

Continued from page 37

I hate magic. "Obviously I wasn't thinking clearly. If I had been, I would have made sure you arrived in a car." I pulled my keys out of my pocket. "Let me drive you wherever you were going." I took a step toward the door and found I couldn't move.

"We're not going to be able to leave the circle until we say whatever hasn't been said, just like the others." Thws crossed his arms. "I think my note said everything I wanted to say."

Yeah, it *won't work* and I've found someone else was pretty clear. What else was there to say? But clearly I had to say something, or we'd be stuck in this bar forever.

"Look, neither one of us believes in happily ever after. We both know relationships are a lot harder than that. After our last big blowup—when I asked you to give me a week to think things over—I decided it was impossible. Humans and fairies are just too different."

"So we agree?" Thws sounded doubtful.

Was I going to have to blubber true confessions to get out of this trap? "I sometimes try to do impossible things." At least when I found someone I thought it was worth doing them for. But I'd rot in this circle rather than tell him that.

Thws twisted a bit, trying to see if we were free. We weren't. He turned to me, a wry look in his eye. "I always liked your 'do the impossible before breakfast' attitude. But I figured after the last argument even you had given up." He shrugged.

Now he was ticking me off. "Well, if you had waited more than four days, I might have gotten around to telling you different." I felt the force holding us dissolve.

Thws muttered something like, "Was it only four days?"

Honestly, fairies had no sense of time. I took a step backward, letting go of my anger in a sharp breath. "Come on. Let me take you where you're going. I don't want you to be missed."

"I was only heading over to the Wild Hunt." He fell in beside me, and we headed for the door.

The Wild Hunt was a fairy pickup bar. Apparently Thws was between lovers. Not that I was going to let that matter to me.

He slowed his steps, hanging back a little. I turned to see what was happening.

"I'm not in a hurry," he said. "Do you want to have a drink?"

My clients, the Gligmar, their lovers, and assorted well wishers waved to me from the bar. A drink was not a relationship. I reminded myself.

"Yes, I do." I caught a whiff of burning vegetable matter. The witch had her brazier set up again. She might get the spell right this time. "But not here. This bar is full of losers and I've dealt with enough lost things today." ■

## captain fantasy

Continued from page 53

in the world, to work for her.

I couldn't allow that. Spaceboy had died once, at Baron Von Blitz's hands, and when he died Captain Fantasy went berserk, destroyed the artillery, killed the Baron, broke the entire German tank line ... and changed the course of the war. That death, the death of his hoy lover, drove the Captain to perform unparalleled feats of heroism.

I didn't think about it for too long. I knew I'd talk myself out of it. I refused to dwell on the small possibility of my own survival, either—I'd live, or I wouldn't. The result would be worthwhile either way.

All that talk at the Facility about the greater good must have gotten to me.

The glass box was strong, the platform below me well braced, but Kelli hadn't known about my smartsuit, about the built-in musculature. To help me do somersaults and shit, Brady had said, but it could do more. I braced my hands on the glass walls, lifted my legs, and kicked straight down. The Captain and the bad guys looked up at the thud, but I didn't stop. I kicked again, felt the metal shiver. One more would do it. I looked the Captain in the eye, and I blew him a kiss.

I kicked the platform as hard as I could, the smartsuit driving my legs like pistons. I screamed when my left femur snapped, and thought of poor stupid Carl Spandau, arms broken for love.

The hinges snapped, and the trapdoor fell open. I held myself up with the pressure of my arms against the walls for a moment and looked down at the whirling blades. They didn't fill the whole pit—there were gaps—but they filled enough of it.

I let go and fell, twisting mightily in the air, pushing my Touretter's speed and the smartsuit's agility to the limit.

The last thing I heard was the Captain, calling his dead lover's name.

When I woke, Brady sat beside my hospital bed holding my hand. "Li," he said, hoarse. He looked like he hadn't slept, red-eyed with mussed hair. "You bastard."

I looked at him, then at my hand. Pink, unscarred, soft. New tissue. "I lived," I said, a little surprised.

"It's a miracle," he said. "You lost your arms and legs, right up to the shoulders and the thighs. The blades nicked your head and torso, but you lived."

A miracle. I didn't argue. I'd done what I intended, twisted so the blades wouldn't damage anything vital, just my extremities. The shock rendered me unconscious, but bodies are smart, especially Metamorph bodies. My wounds sealed as soon as my limbs came off. "How long?"

"Four months," Brady said. "We've been

pumping you full of food, Li, right into your veins. It was damn creepy, watching your arms and legs grow again. Like watching parts of a baby grow up in time-lapse."

"Ever the apt metaphor," I said, voice raspy from long disuse. "What happened ...?" I didn't know what I meant, Kelli or the Storm Troupe or the Captain. Probably all of it.

"The Captain went batshit, Li, he destroyed everything." He shook his head. "The Most Wanted List has been considerably revised. Lots of names got crossed off that day. Our boys were nearby, they rushed in when the base went boom and got you and the Captain out."

"Kelli?"

Brady shook his head. "We don't know. The Captain has never killed a woman. He didn't think she mattered, he said. Thought she was a girlfriend, and didn't chase her when she ran off. We didn't find Mengele, either."

"Mengele's dead."

"You're sure?"

I nodded, tired of talking, then thought of something else I wanted to say. "The Captain's back in his white room, I guess."

Brady grinned. "No, hoss, he's not. He's still our guest, but he's recovered."

I didn't breathe for a moment. "What?"

"We don't know how, but he's all better, since shortly after we got him back here. He remembers everything, pretty much, and what he didn't know we told him. He wants to meet you." He looked at his watch. "It's time for your pills right now, though."

"What kind of pills?"

He shrugged. "I'm not a doctor, Li."

I nodded, swallowed what he gave me. Some of them were drugs to regulate the Tourette's, I figured. I wondered how long it would take Brady to tell me about that. Whether he'd admit that Captain Fantasy gave me the syndrome, or just say it mysteriously developed. Time would tell. I tried not to expect too much from Brady.

The Captain being OK ... that was good news. Very good.

A few days later I got to see the Captain. The room where we met differed from the white room in particulars; it had a nice dark carpet, wallpaper, armchairs ... but essentially it served the same function. A place for a powerful, dangerous, wonderful man to wait.

He wore jeans and a dark blue sweatshirt now, his hair a red crewcut, and he looked at me for a long time. "You don't look a damn thing like Spaceboy," he said at last.

I smiled. "I had a different face, then." I sat gingerly in the chair. My new appendages were tender.

"I tore all the bugs out of this room," the Captain said matter-of-factly. "They haven't had time to put in new surveillance equipment. We need to talk in the meantime."

I nodded slowly. "OK."

"I apologize for kissing you. Understand, I



mistook your identity. Looking at you now, I have to say, you aren't even my type." He smiled, a ghost of his go-to-hell grin.

"Understood, sir." My face wanted to blush, but I wouldn't let it.

"I loved Spaceboy in a special way. Most people don't know that. Nobody but you and me, now. I'd like to keep it that way."

"Your secret's safe, Captain."

"There's something else most people don't know." He sighed, looked contemplatively at the wallpaper. Seeing him like this, so weary and passive, struck me as wrong. He should have been out busting heads for God and country, not sitting tired in a small room. "I have a lot of control over my own mind, my own *brain*. I don't get hurt, I don't get old, I can see farther than most, hear better ... mostly I don't think about how I do it, I just do. But I *can* think about it, and control things." He looked me in the eye. "When you met me, I didn't know what year it was, and I didn't know Spaceboy had died. I liked it that way, Mr. Li. I had a hard time after the war, as you may know. One day, in the '70s, I decided I didn't like my life anymore. Suicide always seemed like a coward's way to me, and I didn't know if I could die anyway. The prospect of living forever, without *him* ... It didn't appeal. So I thought about my brain for a while, read about some things, amnesia, Korsakov's syndrome ..." He crossed his legs, clasped his hands over his knee. "See where I'm going with this?"

"You gave yourself Korsakov's syndrome," I said, both surprised and not surprised. It made sense.

"The best days of my life ended when Spaceboy died, Li. I wanted them back." He shrugged. "After seeing *you* get cut up, that trauma repeated, something shook loose in my head, and I remembered it all. I thought I'd try to make a go of my life again ..." He shook his head. "It's no good. I just feel too heavy. But I wanted to talk to you. To tell you, to ask you to keep my secrets. I want to go back, Mr. Li. They'll say I had a relapse. Nobody but you will know different." He held out his hand.

I took it. He shook my hand gently. "Sir," I said. "Sir, I never told you, I grew up reading about you, and—"

His face brightened. "Are you a doctor?" he said. "Say, that must have been some knock on the head I took!"

I disengaged my hand from his, carefully, and stood. I turned my back to leave, then stopped. I faced him. He'd only remember for a few moments, but that would be enough.

"Sir," I said. "You're my hero."

He smiled slowly, his whole face lighting, like the sun filling the sky. "Thank you, son. Thank you."

I shut the door behind me. ☛

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